

House Modernization Committee  
Member Day - Kim Schrier, M.D. (WA-08) Remarks  
April 15, 2021

- Thank you to the Committee on the Modernization of Congress for holding this Member Day today
- As a second term member of Congress, I believe there are ways to modernize the Congress and make it work better for members, staff, and our constituents
- One major issue behind all of those potential changes is bipartisanship, or the lack of it
- One of the most common questions I receive during my town halls is “What are you doing to bridge the partisan divide in Washington, DC?” or “What are you doing to work across the aisle?” or “Congress is broken. What are you doing to make it better?”
- I often call my district and its demographics a miniature Washington state, and more broadly, a miniature United States
  - o We have suburbs of Seattle, the Cascade Mountains, Mount Rainier, and farmland in Central Washington – on one side you’ll find the headquarters of Costco, on the other side of the mountains you’re in the heart of the Apple Capital of the world.
  - o It’s a pretty diverse district.
- Whether people identify as a Democrat or Republican, we all have the same goals of putting food on the table, making a living wage, being able to afford health care, and give our children a better future than we had
- Because we have shared goals, we can often work together and at least come together from a place of having a shared goal
- I believe that many of my fellow members of Congress feel this way
- In the Committee on Modernization’s 116<sup>th</sup> Congress report, you cited that “Many Members crave bipartisanship and a functioning body of government to address the problems important to their constituents; to write better legislation; and to strengthen trust in the institution.”
- I could not have said this better myself
- So... how do we get to a place where Democrats and Republicans can work together towards our shared goals of helping our constituents and making the United States a better country for future generations?

- As I see it, we need more opportunities to get to know our fellow members on a personal basis

- o I support this committee's **recommendation to create bipartisan members-only spaces** in the Capitol to help facilitate meetings or informal hangouts with members from across the aisle

- o I have often thought about the need for more opportunities to build friendships with those outside of the democratic party – small events, hosted in each other homes or game nights that allow for meaningful interactions.

- o Mr. Chairman, you know that our Washington state delegation has a standing breakfast for all the members in our delegation once a month

- o Not everyone can make it every time, but these regular meetings help grow relationships and enable us to identify shared values. They give us an opportunity to learn more about one another and to talk about the issues at home in Washington state

- We need Committees to function more like this one, to encourage bipartisanship and civility between members and the staff

- Along those lines, I'd also like to see constructive discussions during Committee hearings and meetings. Too often it feels like we come into a hearing with a predetermined outcome, with both sides making their case but ultimately not changing the outcome

- o I find it frustrating that Democrats and Republicans sit on different sides of the room. *We're divided before we even start a meeting!*

- o We should sit next to our Republican colleagues during committee activity, which will encourage engagement, and also help ensure we are actually *listening* to one another.

- o We might find we have more in common that way

- I also want to underscore the Committee's recommendation of bipartisan policy retreats which could help lay the groundwork for bipartisan legislation

- o Look, compromise usually means that both sides aren't totally happy with the outcome

- o But our constituents expect us to work together, and there are many members on both sides of the aisle that I would like to work with to deliver for my constituents and state

- In my little of over two years in Congress, I have found ways to work across the aisle on issues like vaccines, nutrition assistance, help for farmers and farm workers, and increasing access to Medicaid
- These issues can be very partisan out in the world. But my colleagues, including my Republican colleagues from Washington, and I have found common ground on these issues. I am confident that many of us can find common ground on most issues too
- Too often it feels like this institution is currently set up to continue partisanship, instead of looking for ways to support bipartisanship

It is set up for obstruction and finding reasons to not support one another's proposals

And it often feels as though we are operating with different sets of facts and talking past one another.

It sure would be nice to hear something like this in a hearing: "X brought up a really interesting point that I'm glad we considered in this legislation ... Here's the way we thought to address it. Do you have another proposal, other than scrapping the entire bill?" And then we listen and potentially change our plan.

Of course, this also depends on an agreement that if compromise is found, there will be eventual support and Republican votes for the bill. That seems to be a big lift as well.

- The Committee on Modernization is working to make this possible. Let's keep it going with other committees and on the member to member level
- Thank you again for the opportunity to speak today