

## **In the News: House Democrats Introduce Resolution to Allow Remote Voting and Virtual Committee Proceedings**

*Yesterday, House Democrats introduced a resolution to temporarily allow remote voting and virtual committee proceedings during the coronavirus pandemic. Just like other nations and states, the House must continue operating for the people. Here is a look press coverage on the resolution:*

### [From the Washington Post:](#)

“House Majority Leader Steny H. Hoyer (D-Md.) formally introduced a pair of rules changes designed to revive congressional action in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic that has left Congress sputtering for the past two months.

“Hoyer said Wednesday that his resolution, drafted after bipartisan negotiations with GOP leaders, will allow lawmakers to cast their votes from afar if they cannot be present in the Capitol for “reasons beyond our control” related to the virus. Those lawmakers would designate their proxy to another lawmaker who is present. The proposal would also empower committees to formally hold hearings through technology, both as a hybrid in which some members are present in hearing rooms and others are appearing via video, and some that will be done entirely by remote video conferencing.”

“‘That one big step is to make sure Congress can act,’ Hoyer said Wednesday morning in an interview with The Washington Post, before formally introducing the resolution in a brief House session.”

“He noted that the Senate was already using hybrid hearings, pointing to Tuesday’s high-profile appearance of federal health experts all appearing by video. He also highlighted this month’s oral arguments of the Supreme Court that for the first time were conducted entirely by conference calls as the audio was aired live on C-SPAN. ‘This is not a radical departure,’ Hoyer said.”

“...Hoyer said that he incorporated several ideas from House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-Calif.) during negotiations over the last few weeks.”

“The proposal will be in effect whenever congressional health and security officials deem that there is a public health emergency related to the virus. Shortly after Hoyer introduced the measure, D.C. Mayor Muriel E. Bowser (D) extended the city’s stay-at-home order, ban on mass gatherings and closure of nonessential businesses through June 8, saying infections have not declined enough to start reopening the capital.”

“In a follow-up letter to fellow Democrats, Hoyer told them that the legislature had to adapt in such critical times to act safely and not put anyone at risk through constant travel to and from Washington, while also continuing to meet and help oversee the federal government’s response to these crises. ‘A failure to meet this moment and adapt with the use of new tools will lead to a sidelined legislative branch and an upset in the careful balance our framers enshrined in the Constitution. The House must rise to this challenge — and we will,’ Hoyer wrote.”

### [From the New York Times:](#)

“Democratic leaders pushed ahead on Wednesday with their plans to change the rules of the House of Representatives to allow lawmakers to legislate remotely for the first time, unveiling a revised proposal for proxy voting and digital committee meetings during the pandemic. Both changes, which are expected to win approval on Friday, would be firsts for a tradition-bound body that has been loath to alter its

*Office of Majority Leader Steny H. Hoyer, 5/14/20*

rules, even with the advent of new digital technologies. After weeks of debate, they reflect the leaders' conclusion that there may be no other way for Congress to fully function in the months to come as Covid-19 continues to spread in the capital and around the country."

"There is no substitute for personally meeting — coming together in a committee room or the House floor and members interfacing with one another' Representative Steny H. Hoyer, Democrat of Maryland and the majority leader, said in an interview. 'However, if that can't be done, this rule is providing that the Congress will nevertheless be able to work, will nevertheless be able to respond to the issue of the day.'"

"The mayor of Washington, D.C., Muriel E. Bowser, said Wednesday that the city was extending its stay-at-home order through June 8."

"Democrats were close to adopting similar changes last month, but pulled back amid opposition by Republicans, saying they would seek consensus on the historic change. But those efforts were unsuccessful, and Friday's vote is now expected to take place mostly along partisan lines. Mr. Hoyer said he was disappointed Republicans were not backing the move, adding that several of their ideas had been included in the final proposal. Friday's vote will authorize the House to study the feasibility of using technology for members to fully cast votes remotely, rather than using an in-person proxy."

#### From Politico:

"House Democrats rolled out a proposed new rule on Wednesday to allow proxy voting, even as they prepare for a showdown within their own caucus over a \$3 trillion coronavirus relief bill."

"There's still reservations the minority has as to whether this could work and work accurately,' Hoyer said. 'This neither advantages the majority nor disadvantages the minority. This is simply to replicate what we can do in person but are precluded from doing by an extrinsic force.'"

"Democrats would also allow committees to hold remote hearings, markups and depositions. But Hoyer said House panels would start with hearings first to ease members into the change and get them comfortable with the remote technology before voting on legislation in committee."

"The looming rules change vote comes three weeks after Pelosi hit pause on a similar plan, backed only by Democrats, in an effort to bring Republicans on board. Hoyer said despite three meetings and multiple calls with McCarthy, the two sides weren't able to come to a bipartisan deal. Democrats, however, did incorporate some Republican ideas into their final proposal, which Hoyer said the House would only use for extreme emergencies, such as the current pandemic."

"Neither the speaker, nor I, nor McCarthy ... believe that there's any substitute for in-person participation,' Hoyer said, adding the leaders all agree it should be used only in the 'rarest of instances.'"

#### From Roll Call:

"Unable to reach an agreement with their Republican colleagues, House Democrats will again attempt to change chamber rules to allow members to vote by proxy on legislation brought to the floor and to let committees use technology to hold official business meetings."

“‘The intent of this is to allow the Congress to remain operative. We are the policymaking body and we cannot be neutered, if you will, by a virus,’ Majority Leader Steny H. Hoyer told CQ Roll Call on Wednesday, right around the time Democrats unveiled their proposal.”

“The Maryland Democrat said that in addition to the urgency of the coronavirus pandemic, warnings from public health officials about a possible resurgence of the virus in the fall are driving the effort to ensure that Congress can operate if it once again becomes necessary to reduce the number of in-person gatherings.”

“‘We will now move forward on these temporary emergency procedures to ensure the House can continue fully working for the people during this public health and economic emergency,’ Hoyer, McGovern and House Administration Chairwoman Zoe Lofgren, D-Calif., said in a statement. ‘The time has come to act — further delay is not an option.’”

“Democrats say several Republican ideas were incorporated into the revised proxy voting and committee action resolution, including barring committees from conducting secret or executive sessions remotely, due to concerns about security.”

#### From The Hill:

“House Democrats on Wednesday unveiled a measure that would allow for a form of remote voting and virtual committee work as a way to ensure that lawmakers can proceed with legislative business while away from the Capitol during the coronavirus pandemic.”

“Democrats have been pressing for allowing remote voting over the last two months since they have mostly stayed away from the Capitol out of safety concerns over traveling to a city that is one of the nation's coronavirus hot spots. But Republicans, who have been resistant to allowing remote voting as they back President Trump's calls to reopen the economy, are expected to oppose the changes.”

“The proposed rules changes are similar to what Democrats initially planned to vote on last month, before they decided to hold off to allow discussions with a bipartisan task force to study virtual options for the House. The task force — which included House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-Md.), Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-Calif.) and the chairs and ranking Republicans on the Rules and Administration committees — has been discussing proposals for the last few weeks but was unable to reach an agreement.”

“Hoyer, House Rules Committee Chairman Jim McGovern (D-Mass.) and House Administration Committee Chairwoman Zoe Lofgren (D-Calif.) said in a joint statement that ‘while we could not come to an agreement, we have incorporated several Republican ideas into this resolution.’”