

U.S. Congressman
Nick Rahall
WORKING FOR WEST VIRGINIANS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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RAHALL AND COLLEAGUES WANT OPEN FORUM

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- How many times have you seen it? Neil Kinnock, leader of the opposition Labor Party in Great Britain, standing before the entire House of Commons, fending off sharp witticism after caustic barb. These are men of rapier wit trading blows in frank and open debate, a true democracy. Yet, in America...?

That is why U.S. Rep. Nick Rahall (D-WV) has joined 40 of his colleagues in introducing a resolution that would make the Cabinet Secretaries available, on every first Tuesday of each month, for a question and answer period.

One month it could be Secretary Skinner answering questions on infrastructure, the next month it could be Secretary Kemp discussing the low-income housing shortage.

The resolution, which has been promoted in the past by former President Carter and Vice-President Walter Mondale, would institute the question period on a trial basis for this Congress only.

"This concept is neither partisan or political," said Rahall. "It only seeks to encourage the open and frank discussion of issues between the Executive and Legislative branches of government."

This bill in no way disturbs the balance of power between the Executive and Legislative branches of government. It simply allows the Speaker, during the 102nd Congress, to invite a member of the cabinet to speak. That member is in no way required to participate.

"If you have ever watched the House of Commons in action, I think you would agree that the element of drama present there makes it infinitely more interesting than our own House of Representatives. I wholeheartedly believe that the American people would benefit from such a proposal," he added.

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SAM GEJDENSON
2D DISTRICT
CONNECTICUT

COMMITTEE ON
FOREIGN AFFAIRS

CHAIRMAN,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL
ECONOMIC POLICY AND TRADE

COMMITTEE ON INTERIOR
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COMMITTEE ON HOUSE
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MAJORITY WHIP AT-LARGE



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NOTE: Understand you spoke with Sam on floor that you expressed willingness to support. I love this idea - do you want to go on? TY BK

4/25/92 P.R.

WANT TO ASK DICK CHENEY ABOUT CHANGING DEFENSE POLICIES?

OR TALK TO JACK KEMP ABOUT HUD DEVELOPMENTS?

THEN

BECOME AN ORIGINAL COSPONSOR OF THE "QUESTION PERIOD" BILL

"I AM THOROUGHLY CONVINCED THAT A FRANK, OPEN CONSULTATION BETWEEN . . . CABINET MEMBERS AND MEMBERS OF CONGRESS WOULD BE BENEFICIAL TO CONGRESS, TO THE EXECUTIVE, AND IN THE INTEREST OF BETTER GOVERNMENT" -- Congressman Estes Kefauver (1943)

Dear Colleague:

Congressman Kefauver made the above statement on the House floor in 1943 when he first introduced a bill to institute a congressional question period for Members of the President's Cabinet. Forty-five years later, as I introduce a similar question period bill, I find his remarks as timely as ever.

My motivation for drafting legislation to institute a question period on a trial basis--for this Congress only--is neither partisan nor political. I strongly believe this bill would bring about a more productive dialogue between the Congress and the Executive Branch.

Question period would take place on the first Tuesday of each month for two hours. After a Cabinet member accepts an invitation extended by the Speaker to respond to Congressional inquiries on the House floor, Members would submit written questions 7 days in advance. Both the Majority and Minority parties would be given equal question time. A five-minute time limit would be placed on the Cabinet Member's response to a submitted question. One follow-up question, by the Member asking the question, would be permitted.

This legislation seeks to supplement the current Committee forum for the exchange of information between the Administration and the Congress. One of the major advantages of the question period is that it would expose Cabinet members to a fuller range of congressional viewpoints. For example, many Members of Congress are knowledgeable and concerned about education issues, but do not serve on the Education and Labor Committee. Question period would give these Members the opportunity to question the Secretary of Education.

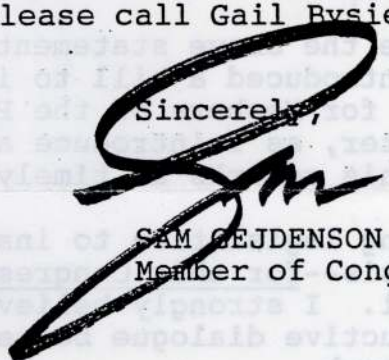
As Members of the British Parliament have found, there is another benefit to the question period: it increases public awareness of the activities of Government in general and strengthens the system of democracy by adding an element of drama.

This bill is constitutional and in no way disturbs the balance of power between the Executive and Congressional branches of government. The resolution simply allows the Speaker, during the 102nd Congress, to invite a Member of the Cabinet to attend a question period. The Cabinet Member is not required, by any legal constraint, to accept the Speaker's invitation.

Housing and Urban Development Secretary Jack Kemp acknowledged to the Washington Post that he is supportive of the idea. Walter Mondale and former President Jimmy Carter have also promoted question period initiatives in the past.

If you are interested in becoming an original cosponsor of this resolution, please call Gail Bysiewicz of my staff at X5-2076.

Sincerely,


SAM GEJDENSON
Member of Congress