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House of Representatives

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June 29, 2020

The Honorable Steve Scalise
Ranking Member
Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Ranking Member Scalise:

I am writing to express my profound disappointment that the Republican Members of the Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis refused to wear masks during Friday's hearing, which was held one day after the United States reached the highest number of new coronavirus cases on record, and after the disease has already killed more people in the United States than in any other nation on Earth.

Masks save lives. As Members of Congress, we have a responsibility to protect our colleagues, our staffs, our witnesses, the Capitol Police, and custodial and other frontline workers from potentially deadly exposure to the coronavirus.¹ This starts with taking basic steps to avoid transmitting the virus to those around us—even if we are asymptomatic and may not know we have it—by wearing face coverings whenever we are in an enclosed space near other people for an extended period of time.

Wearing masks at indoor gatherings is strongly encouraged by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Attending Physician of the Congress has issued clear, unequivocal guidelines that require Members to wear masks at all committee hearings. The guidelines state:

For U.S. House of Representatives meetings in a limited enclosed space, such as a committee hearing room, for greater than 15 minutes, face coverings are **REQUIRED**. ...

¹ *Coronavirus Cases Climbing Among Front-Line Workers in Congress*, Roll Call (June 19, 2020) (online at www.rollcall.com/2020/06/19/coronavirus-cases-climbing-among-frontline-workers-in-congress/).

Individual entry will be denied to those House of Representatives limited enclosed spaces where face coverings are required but not used by the individual (unless presenting a valid medical waiver approved by OAP).²

The Attending Physician's guidelines make clear that the mask requirement is in addition to—not an alternative to—social distancing guidelines:

Use of a face covering is a separate secondary method of lowering transmission risk. It is NOT a substitute for social distancing. Even if you wear a face covering, every effort should be made adhere to six-foot social distancing guidelines.³

Prior to Friday's hearing, I notified all Subcommittee Members that masks must be worn at the hearing and that "strict adherence to the Attending Physician's Guidelines is required for all participants."⁴ Subcommittee staff placed signs outside the hearing room as a reminder. I reiterated this requirement in person prior to and during the hearing, in light of dangerous resurgences now occurring throughout the country.⁵

Yet every single Republican Member of the Subcommittee refused to comply.

My Republican colleagues' refusal to wear masks is perplexing because you have asked repeatedly to hold in-person hearings, and you assured me that this could be done safely. In response, I told you that I would work in good faith to hold in-person hearings if we could do so safely and consistent with the Attending Physician's guidelines.

I was true to my word—I held this hearing in person, as you requested. Unfortunately, the Republican Members' refusal to wear masks undermined the safety of everyone in the hearing room.

Going forward, as long as the Attending Physician's requirement to wear masks is in place, I will not recognize any Member of this Subcommittee to participate in person in any Subcommittee meeting or hearing unless the Member is wearing a mask and strictly adheres to the Attending Physician's guidance. Members who do not wish to wear a mask are welcome to participate remotely, in accordance with House Resolution 965.

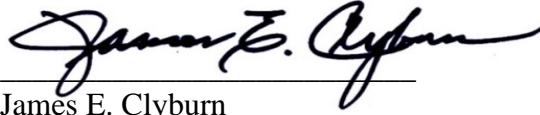
² The Attending Physician, *Attending Physician Pandemic Social Distancing and Daily Health Screening Implementation* (June 23, 2020) (online at <https://attendingphysician.house.gov/covid19/social-distancing-guidelines.htm>).

³ *Id.*

⁴ Notice from Chairman James E. Clyburn to Members, Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis, *Hearing on "Accountability in Crisis: GAO's Recommendations to Improve the Federal Coronavirus Response"* (June 19, 2020).

⁵ *Record Spikes in U.S. Coronavirus Cases Push Up Hospitalization Rates in 16 States*, CNBC (June 25, 2020) (online at www.cnbc.com/2020/06/25/record-spikes-in-us-coronavirus-cases-push-up-hospitalization-rates-in-16-states.html).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "James E. Clyburn". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath it.

James E. Clyburn
Chairman