

Testimony of Rep. Richard Hudson
Before the Committee on House Administration
March 7, 2023

Modernizing and Securing Members Telephone Townhalls and Communication

Chairman Steil and Ranking Member Morelle, thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony to the Committee and for soliciting proposals on how the House of Representatives can better serve its members and more importantly our constituents.

I appreciate the opportunity to present my proposal to improve constituent engagement by all members of the House of Representatives. As we know, the government oftentimes lags in keeping up with technology, and the U.S. House of Representatives is no exception. Our D.C.-based duties sometimes keep us away from our Districts for extended periods of time, but these are the times when we should be seeking input back home the most. In addition, with the looming threat of surveillance from the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), our communications with constituents deserve robust cyber and data security protections. For this reason, I believe it is time to allow the House to offer access to a service for members to communicate with their constituents as much as they like, both telephone townhalls and text messaging.

Modernizing our communications will help Congress be more accountable to our constituents. Last Congress, nearly 400 Members used a telephone townhall platform totaling between 1,500- 2,000 events. These events were paid for individually by each office on a per-event basis. In addition, over half of the members in the House reached out to 10,000 constituents per week via SMS messages. These texts were paid for on a per-phone number basis.

As you can see, the large majority of members in the House of Representatives use these services. This Committee should leverage economies of scale and encourage the solicitation of bids for a House-wide contract for a communications platform that can provide such services. This would create efficiencies for our offices by reducing the need to negotiate with a vendor every time a member wants to host an event. It would allow us to benefit from bulk pricing given the number of events held and volume of messages sent on an annual basis. And finally, unlimited access to telephone townhalls and SMS messaging would encourage Members to be more disciplined and proactive about keeping their constituents informed regularly, a responsibility we all share.

By providing a House-wide service, the Committee can also be sure members are protecting their data and their constituents' data. Over the years, we have seen numerous reports of CCP agents targeting Members of Congress. To that point, any vendor selected for this, or other constituent-facing services should adhere to strict cybersecurity protocols. These cybersecurity threats continue to evolve, and so too must our technology to address these threats to protect ourselves, our constituents, and this institution from bad actors.

I appreciate your consideration of this cost-saving proposal to facilitate and encourage constituent outreach for the benefit of all Members in the U.S. House of Representatives. Leveraging economies of scale will significantly improve our communication with the very people who send us here for the privilege to represent them.