

## **Rice Discusses New Role on Energy & Commerce Committee and Goals for the Year Ahead**

WASHINGTON, DC — This past Friday, the Franklin Center for Global Policy Exchange hosted a virtual discussion with one of the newest members of the Energy and Commerce Committee, U.S. Rep. Kathleen Rice (D-NY-4).

A six-year veteran of Capitol Hill, she has built a reputation of pragmatic policymaking on both sides of the aisle. The discussion centered around her new committee assignment, but first she kicked things off by touching on her bipartisan track record in Washington.

“There was a recent study that showed me as the 26th most bipartisan Member of Congress,” Rice stated, “and I wear that recognition as a badge of honor. I was also recently named to the Energy and Commerce Committee, which arguably has the broadest jurisdiction of any authorizing committee in the House. I’m very excited for this new opportunity to work on issues that are critically important to my constituents on Long Island, and of course I want to continue to find bipartisan solutions on this committee as well.”

According to Rice, the memory of the January 6th attack on the U.S. Capitol is still fresh in the minds of her and her colleagues. She says it served as a wake-up call for understanding the impact of inflammatory political rhetoric and disinformation on the internet and in the media.

“These lies and conspiracy theories are dangerous, and they’ve led to violence and death. If left unaddressed, they’re going to continue to spread and destroy the future of democracy in this country. I am particularly focused on this issue when it comes to our veterans and military service members, because this group is under attack.”

Rice, a member of the House Homeland Security Committee, continued.

“They are being specifically targeted online by malicious actors, even foreign adversaries, who are spreading disinformation. Veterans and military service members are seen as valuable targets because of their patriotism and their political engagement. They are particularly susceptible to this kind of disinformation, and we know now in the aftermath of January 6th that one-in-five people arrested for storming the Capitol were veterans or active duty military. And much of this disinformation is spreading on social media, including Facebook, where the platform algorithms consistently feed people streams of disinformation.”

Rice then moved on to the latest COVID relief bill that was passed by the Senate over the weekend. The bill, she says, is essential for helping fight the pandemic and keeping Americans



Rep. Kathleen Rice

secure financially.

“I support the American Rescue Plan because the majority, over 70%, of Americans want Congress to act. They want the direct payments. They want the expanded unemployment insurance and small businesses are begging for more funding for the Paycheck Protection Program. We need to finally once and for all crush the virus, and increase access to vaccines, not just the development, but the distribution as well and address the outsized impact this virus has had on communities of color.”

Once the COVID relief package is signed into law, Rice believes an infrastructure package will be next on the agenda.

“I don’t think there’s any better time than now to reinvest in our transit and infrastructure systems. The last time we made a large scale infrastructure investment as a country

was in the middle of the last century, that’s why so much of our infrastructure is crumbling today.

“By making generational investments we can finally modernize and fix our broken infrastructure and at the same time create tens of thousands of quality jobs in the process, giving our economy the extra boost it needs to recover from the pandemic.”

Rice then took a number of questions from the virtual audience, including what kind of role she seeks to carve out on Energy & Commerce in the weeks and months ahead.

“E&C is the opportunity of a lifetime, and we’re going to be dealing with some very difficult issues. Immigration is one of those issues. There’s already been enormous pushback on Biden’s proposal regarding that issue. I just take us back to all those years ago where we almost had an answer, a bipartisan answer, to DACA, and then the issue was hyper-politicized. I hope that broadband is not going to be politicized. I hope cyber security is not going to be politicized.

“My focus in this Congress is to find members on the other side of the aisle who believe in making decisions based on facts. There’s a lot of misinformation and disinformation out there, and it makes it very difficult for us to have discussions on critical issues and not have it devolve into a partisan attack back and

and forth.

Next, Rice was asked about her placement on Energy and Commerce's Communications & Technology Subcommittee and what she believes the subcommittee's focus will be in the coming weeks.

"At some point, the pandemic is going to be over and some businesses are going to have their employees come back to the workplace. But there is most likely a good percentage of people who are just going to keep people working from home, so we need to increase access to internet in this country. We address it pretty substantively in the reconciliation bill, but it will have to be included in the bigger infrastructure package that I'm hoping is going to be considered right after we pass the reconciliation bill.

"Making sure kids are able to be connected to school is absolutely essential as well. This is not a political issue."

Finally, Rice was asked to touch on the Puppies Assisting Wounded Servicemembers (PAWS) Act, a bipartisan bill cosponsored with GOP Rep. Steve Stivers (OH-15) that seeks to give veterans access to service dogs, which have proven to be an invaluable resource to those struggling with mental health issues following service to their country.

"Steve Stivers and I are so passionate about this. The VA has been very good at expanding the treatments for veterans suffering from PTSD and other traumatic brain injury issues like that.

Long-term PTSD issues can make it very difficult for some returning veterans to leave their homes, to do simple tasks, even inside of their homes. The VA allows things like equine therapy and meditation and a bunch of other stuff, but we couldn't get them to approve of service dogs for veterans, which I think is crazy.

"The fact that we have to kind of legislate this is unfortunate, but it had wide bipartisan support in the last Congress. We have to give veterans as many opportunities to get treatment that we know are effective, like these companion dogs that are lifesaving for these veterans."

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