

Newhouse & Kilmer Set Aside Partisanship to Serve Their Home State

WASHINGTON, DC — Dan Newhouse is a Republican. Derek Kilmer is a Democrat. Together, they have worked to set aside their political differences and try to do what's best for the people they represent in their home state of Washington.

Newhouse represents the 4th District of the Evergreen State in the U.S. House of Representatives, while Kilmer represents Washington's 6th District. They appeared before a virtual meeting of The Ripon Society and Franklin Center this past Wednesday to discuss their work across the aisle and their approach to legislating over the past few years.

"The most important decision I made in the last year was not about a vote I took or a position on a specific issue," Kilmer said, kicking things off. "It was a decision I made at the beginning of this pandemic to actually talk to my constituents directly. I made a commitment that if someone reached out to my office — having lost a job or lost a business or having lost a loved one due to this pandemic — that I wasn't going to send them a form letter. Rather, I would call them. I will tell you — those conversations absolutely have shaped how I've approached public policy. And it's absolutely shaped the sense of urgency that I've had.

"I talked to a woman from the town where I grew up, Port Angeles, Washington. And she said to me through tears, 'I have worked my entire life. I used to organize the food drive for my employer. And for the first time in my life, I had to go to a food bank because I couldn't figure out how to feed my family otherwise.' So when we, for example, passed the American Rescue Plan, it was for me about helping her and helping people who were in circumstances similar to hers. It was about making sure that she could put food on her table, and making sure that — whether it was someone who might be at risk of losing their housing or the ability to feed their families or the ability to pay their bills through no fault of their own — we had their back."

First elected in 2012, Kilmer serves as a member of the Appropriations Committee. He also serves as Chairman of the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress, which was established in 2019 to bring the Legislative Branch into the 21st century so it can more effectively



U.S. Reps. Dan Newhouse (left) and Derek Kilmer (right)

address the challenges facing the American people.

One of those challenges is investing in America's infrastructure — a challenge which Kilmer touched on in his remarks.

"I represent a district that is not Seattle and that still has communities which are struggling economically," the Washington lawmaker stated. "Frankly, many of these communities were struggling before the pandemic.

It seems strange to say given its proximity to some amazing technology companies, but my District is in the bottom third of the country when it comes to access to the internet.

"And one thing we learned over the course of this last year is that access to the internet is not just

about whether you can watch season three of Cobra Kai on Netflix — which you should, because it was terrific. But it's also about whether your kid can keep learning if school has gone virtual, or whether you can have that tele-health appointment with your doctor, or whether you can keep operating your business even if your storefront is shut down. And for a lot of my constituents, they can't.

"So there's a real excitement and enthusiasm about moving an infrastructure bill that not only addresses things like roads and bridges, but also addresses our 21st century infrastructure like access to broadband. I recently spoke with a woman who said that she was desperate to get back to work, but was stymied by the lack of childcare options. I know part of President Biden's America's Family Plan is really targeted at addressing that need and those conversations I've had with constituents have certainly informed my approach on this."

Newhouse opened his remarks with praise for his fellow Washingtonian and a story about the time he invited the Democrat to pay a visit to his rural Republican District

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in the central part of the state.

“You know, listening to Derek — he’s great,” Newhouse said. “In fact, he’s so good that I invited him to come to my District. And it was very well-received. People really enjoyed hearing his perspective on things, even though I come from a red district and Derek comes from a bluer district. But I think that visit proved to people that we don’t always have to agree on everything. We can still have good dialogue and discourse back and forth, and that’s what we should be doing. And I think that’s what our Founding Fathers had in mind when they set up our form of government, as dysfunctional as it sometimes seems.

“The disagreements that we have, the very active debate that we can have, was meant to be that way. We’re not supposed to agree on everything. We’re supposed to put all of our ideas together and come up with the best solution for the people we represent. And I think Derek personifies that process of a positive way of doing it. And I can’t think of a better Chairman of the modernization effort than Derek Kilmer. He’s done a great job, and I think Congress is going to benefit a lot from it moving forward.”

Newhouse is a third-generation Yakima Valley farmer who was first elected to Congress in 2014. He also serves as a member of the Appropriations Committee, where he has earned a reputation as a principled conservative who is willing to work across the aisle and has never forgotten his roots.

In his remarks, he discussed some of his key priorities in Congress, including a bill called the *Farm Workforce Modernization Act* that he introduced earlier this year and was passed by the House on March 18th.

“We raise over 300 different crops in the State of Washington,” Newhouse stated, pointing to the genesis of the legislation. “That is second only I think to California, which has a little warmer climate. And the truth is that there are simply not enough domestic workers to fill the needs that we have in our industry. The current laws pertaining to ag labor are definitely in need of modernization and meaningful reform. And so that’s been a huge emphasis of mine. We’ve got it through the House the second time. The first time in over 35 years that something of this

significance has passed on a bipartisan basis. And I’m proud of that. And now we’re working with the Senate to try to make it become law.”

Newhouse concluded his remarks by touching on a visit he made to Kilmer’s District following the visit Kilmer made to his own.

“Going to his District was truly eye-opening for me,” the Yakima Valley Republican stated, “and I hope that he would say the same for coming to central Washington. I think it gives us a better appreciation of other members. Just because they disagree with my perspective doesn’t mean they’re wrong. They’re doing the best they can to represent their constituents from their point of view. I think the more that we, as members of Congress, understand that whole concept, I think the better off all of us will be.

“Just one little point about that trip that I’m very proud to point out. A group of people heard our presentation at one of the Chamber meetings. They formed a group called the Civility Caucus of the Tri-Cities, and they’re still meeting to this day. I’m really proud about that. They’re working on local issues and on how to be more open-minded, more inclusive, and come up with solutions that are better for the citizens of their community. And I’m just really happy that maybe we had a small impact on making lives better for people and opening up conversations.”

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