## U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Agriculture Washington, DC 20515

January 3, 2013

The Honorable John Boehner Speaker U.S. House of Representatives Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Speaker:

Please accept my warmest congratulations on your re-election as Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives. Given what occurred in the last Congress, I feel it is necessary to ask, do you truly intend to manage the U.S. House of Representatives for the 113<sup>th</sup> Congress under "regular order," particularly as it pertains to legislation produced by the Committee on Agriculture?

Three months before being elected Speaker, you were asked in an interview, "How will your past as a chairman and legislator... influence your approach to allowing Committees to set the agenda and give signals to instead of receive them from Leadership?" You answered, "We need to stop writing bills in the Speaker's office and let members of Congress be legislators again... We have nothing to fear from letting the House work its will – nothing to fear from the battle of ideas. That starts with the Committees. The result will be more scrutiny and better legislation." In your 2011 inaugural address you said, "Above all else, we will welcome the battle of ideas, encourage it, and engage in it – openly, honestly, and respectfully. As the chamber closest to the people, the House works best when it is allowed to work its will. I ask all members of this body to join me in recognizing this common truth."

Unfortunately, those noble words turned into empty promises when it came time to consider legislation to reauthorize the federal farm safety net. Despite a day-long mark-up, where almost 60 amendments were offered, considered and either adopted or rejected; despite having the support of myself, the Chairman of the Agriculture Committee and a majority of Committee Democrats and Republicans; despite following the practice of regular order as you laid out for us, the Republican Leadership was nothing but a stumbling block in our quest to let the House "work its will" on a new five-year farm bill.

The Republican Leadership first stepped in and asked the Chairman and me to delay our mark-up, saying they wanted to consider the agriculture appropriations bill on the floor first. The Committee held off its mark-up, while the Leadership ultimately did not bring the appropriations bill to floor. This delayed the Committee's work by two weeks. Although the Committee approved a five-year farm bill, the Republican Leadership chose to instead put forward a one-year farm bill extension, which ultimately was not considered because of lack of support. In the fall, we heard Leadership's promises: Mr. Cantor, "I am committed to bringing the issue to the floor..." (October 24, 2012); yourself: "We will deal with the farm bill after the election." (September 20, 2012).

Given your long-standing opposition to farm programs and previous farm bills, it was no surprise that there were provisions in the bill that you could not support. But instead of allowing those objections to be aired in an open debate and letting the House "work its will," the Republican Leadership bottled up the Committee's farm bill and drafted alternatives in the Speaker's and Majority Leader's offices, bypassing both the Chairman and members of the Agriculture Committee and making a mockery of regular order.

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Having served together on the Agriculture Committee for many years, I could not believe that you and your Leadership team could treat the Committee with such disrespect.

I heard Leadership's excuses: that the votes were not there to pass the bill. That is patently false. The Leadership team never conducted a whip count, never asking members whether they would vote for or against the Committee package. I brought together members from both parties to conduct a count, and we found enough votes to pass the bill.

We now need to look at where we go from here. Let me outline some points as I see it:

- Given the behavior of the Republican Leadership and their treatment of the House Agriculture
  Committee in the previous Congress, I believe it is only fair for me to ask for a written
  commitment that your Leadership team will find floor time during this Congress if the
  Committee marks-up a new five-year farm bill. I would also expect it should not take more than a
  month for your team to determine the appropriate time for floor consideration and to announce
  that date publicly.
- Given the Republican Leadership's objections to farm programs in general, I would not expect your team to bear responsibility for finding the votes to pass the Committee's farm bill; that would fall upon the Committee. I also understand and can accept that you and your Leadership team would likely want such a bill to come up under an open process, allowing for multiple amendments. I would ask that you let the House "work its will" even if you have personal objections to the outcome. The 2008 Farm Bill was one of the last bills enacted under regular order, where then-Speaker Pelosi formally appointed conferees and allowed me to open the Conference Committee process to the public. I hope you will be willing to make the same commitment.
- At this point, however, I see no reason why the House Agriculture Committee should undertake
  the fool's errand to craft another long-term farm bill if the Republican Leadership refuses to give
  any assurances that our bipartisan work will be considered. You and your Leadership team seem
  very content with simply extending the 2008 Farm Bill year after year without making any effort
  at reform, achieving savings and efficiencies, or improving the farm safety net for rural America.
  If that is your goal, I will certainly accommodate you.

Once the other remaining Democratic members of the House Agriculture Committee have been appointed, you can expect a similar letter asking for a similar commitment. I look forward to hearing from you in the coming days.

Sincerely,

Collin C. Peterson Ranking Member

U.S. House Committee on Agriculture