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To the Editor;

Last week in the Vermont House of Representatives there was a “token” session with about 12 members present to pass urgent COVID 19 bills related to unemployment and other matters. But the House Speaker also put forward House Resolution #18, which requires that House Rules be changed to allow for remote sessions and remote voting. This resolution was to be passed by the few members present and then later ratified through remote voting.

So House Resolution #18 required that we institute remote sessions and remote voting with a remote vote. I think that is circular. To change House Rules we need a majority vote of the House. It is contradictory to think that remote voting can be put in place by a remote vote using a system that we do not yet have. In my opinion this resolution violated the rules of the House, and I think that those rules matter, even now. So I called for a quorum: there needs to be a majority of 76 House members present to conduct official business. If no one calls for a quorum business can be conducted with fewer.

If the Speaker had been willing to defer consideration of the remote voting resolution I would have dropped my call for a quorum, and we could have voted on the COVID 19 emergency bills before us and the other resolutions. She was not willing to do that.

While I called for the quorum, I did not actually call anyone in, Speaker Johnson and other members of the majority and minority leadership did that. No one who was uncomfortable had to come in, and we all sat 6 feet apart, and it was brief. While I understand very well our current situation, I think that it is unwise to use an emergency to justify cutting corners on representative democracy, which I think that the presentation of HR18 at a “token” session did do. It has now passed in accordance with House Rules. We will see if it is later ratified by three quarters of the House using the anticipated remote voting system.

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