

United States Senate

April 9, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Leader McConnell and Leader Schumer,

We appreciate your leadership to date as we work to protect the health and economic security of workers and communities impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. As we continue to confront the crisis, we support additional bold and swift measures to save lives and secure the well-being of our constituents. The depth of the crisis and the scope of the response mean that choices being made right now will shape our society for years, if not decades to come. As we work to advance further spending packages to ensure immediate relief and long-term recovery, we need to consider the interrelated crises of income and wealth inequality, racism, and ecological decline, which were in place long before COVID-19, and now risk being intensified. In this critical moment, we need to adequately respond to immediate needs and chart a path to a genuinely healthier and more equitable future through a just recovery.

We call for forthcoming COVID-19 relief and stimulus packages to contribute to a just recovery by upholding these five principles:

I. Health is the top priority, for all people, with no exceptions.

We support the calls of community leaders, public health organizations, unions, and others for free and accessible testing, treatment, and protective equipment; support and training for health care practitioners and first responders; expanded hospital capacity, including in rural areas, territories, and tribal lands; paid sick leave and paid family medical leave for all workers without exception; expanded federal funding for Medicaid; and full funding for Indian Health Service, urban Indian health centers, and Native Hawaiian Health Care Systems. Critically, the government must ensure such health protections cover all people, including low-wage workers, health care workers, independent contractors, family farmers, Black, Asian American and Pacific

Islander (AAPI), and Latinx communities, immigrants (including those who are undocumented), Indigenous peoples, people who are incarcerated, people who are homeless or housing insecure, and others likely to be hit first and worst by COVID-19 and the economic downturn.

II. Provide economic relief directly to the people.

We support the urgent calls to expand the social safety net by broadening unemployment insurance, vastly increasing food aid programs, extending housing assistance, expanding childcare for working families, relieving student debt, and halting evictions, foreclosures, and shut offs of water and electricity. As with expanded public health measures, these economic measures must be implemented to ensure coverage of workers and communities likely to be hit first and worst by COVID-19 and the economic downturn and be made accessible to all. In addition, to counteract the economic downturn, the federal government should immediately direct sizable cash payments to every person, regardless of citizenship status. Larger payments should be made to lower-income workers and the poor, who are disproportionately exposed to both COVID-19 health risks and heightened job insecurity. These payments should be made swiftly and regularly throughout the duration of the economic recession.

III. Rescue workers and communities, not corporate executives.

Any financial assistance directed at specific industries must be channeled to workers, not shareholders or corporate executives. Specifically, any federal loans must be used to maintain payroll and benefits, not executive bonuses, stock buybacks, or corporate tax cuts. In addition, such funds should come with pro-worker conditions, such as requiring worker representation on the company's board of directors, company-wide enactment of a \$15/hour or higher minimum wage, and compliance with high-road labor standards such as payment of prevailing wages, use of project-labor agreements, adoption of a neutrality policy with regard to union collective bargaining, and adoption of a "ban the box" hiring policy to ensure fair employment opportunities for all.

IV. Make a down payment on a regenerative economy, while preventing future crises.

While we urgently need a large, short-term stimulus to protect the health and economic security of those on the front lines of the COVID-19 crisis, we also need to plan for a large, medium-term stimulus to counteract the economic downturn and ensure a just recovery. This stimulus should create millions of good, family-sustaining jobs with high-road labor standards; counter systemic inequities by directing investments to the working families, communities of color, and Indigenous communities who face the most economic insecurity; and tackle the climate crisis that is compounding threats to our economy and health.

All three goals can be achieved simultaneously with public investments to rebuild our infrastructure, replace lead pipes, expand wind and solar power, build clean and affordable public transit, weatherize our buildings, build and repair public housing, manufacture more clean

energy goods, restore our wetlands and forests, expand public services that support climate resilience, and support regenerative agriculture led by family farmers. Critically, stimulus packages should include conditions for industries to implement high-road labor standards, workforce development, and reductions in climate emissions and toxic pollution. The response to one existential crisis must not fuel another.

V. Protect our democratic process while protecting each other.

People must not be forced to choose between exercising their rights as citizens and protecting public health. The federal government must support states, by providing funding and technical support wherever needed, to ensure that every American can vote safely in primary and general elections. Specific life-saving and democracy-defending measures include expanding vote by mail, online or same-day voter registration, safety provisions for polling stations and workers, and voter education during these unprecedented times. The 2020 Census must be fully supported and resourced to achieve an accurate and safe count under the new and evolving conditions. Congress, state capitals and city halls should not shut down until rules have been amended to ensure continuity of governance in the case that in-person sessions are suspended.

Thank you again for your work to jointly respond to this unprecedented public health emergency and the growing economic uncertainty we face ahead. Adhering to these five principles as further relief and stimulus packages are crafted to address COVID-19 will be critical for the long-term health of this nation.

Sincerely,

Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator

Bernard Sanders
United States Senator

Brian Schatz
United States Senator

Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

Kamala D. Harris
United States Senator

Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator

Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator

Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator