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August 19, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
United States Capitol
United States House of Representatives
Washington D.C., 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi,

As the House returns to Washington later this week, I urge you to bring up a simplified, straightforward COVID-19 relief package. I know that the House of Representatives has put forth proposal after proposal and that the Senate and Trump Administration have failed to adequately counteroffer or even pass legislation of their own, but my constituents and millions of others are relying on us to reach a deal that can deliver much-needed aid to those still under threat from COVID-19. That is why I implore you to show that the House is still committed to reaching a deal – and to allow us to lead once again – by passing a relief bill that will provide economic relief, protections against eviction and financial ruin, and funding for our schools, health centers, and critical industries.

With 30 million Americans unemployed due to COVID-19, we must act to ensure our fellow Americans do not lose their housing, lose their income, and lose hope. The latest Executive Order is insufficient, as it cut unemployment benefits by 50 percent and is set to run out of money in September. In addition, as my state begins the process of rebuilding after a recent natural disaster, FEMA funds are being siphoned off to cover the same unemployment benefits that the Senate refused to extend earlier this summer. Only in Washington would we be forced to see benefits for disaster victims and those who are out of work pitted against one another. We must pass an extension of the unemployment benefits that expired in July through at least the end of the year to ensure Americans who are out of work can keep food on their tables and a roof over their heads. We also must include an eviction moratorium extension to prevent unemployed Americans from being forced out of their homes during a public health emergency.

We must also ensure that our small businesses have the support they need for the long term and allow access to more forgivable loans. This can be done either through allowing the hardest-hit businesses access to a second round of Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans, or through a new program like that in the RESTART Act. We cannot allow our small businesses to fail due to government inaction. Without this support, even more Americans will lose their jobs, and the economy will take longer to recover.

Recent natural disaster in Iowa also brought to light the concerns that I have been raising for months about the financial health of our state and local governments. Our municipalities are stretched so thin that an unforeseen disaster like last week's derecho could break their budgets.

Our ability to house, feed, and care for our neighbors impacted by disaster is greatly limited if we do not protect the local governments that are on the front lines of protecting our citizens. As I told the Governor of Iowa, without financial assistance we are trying to help our fellow Iowans with one hand tied behind our back. We need sufficient support to ensure essential services remain in place, and that cities and states can take the necessary steps to respond to a crisis.

I know that we can find common ground to address the lack of testing and tracing necessary to slow the spread of the virus. We also agree on the need to fund our schools, health care facilities, and research on treatments and ultimately a vaccine. There are many ideas we agree on with our Senate counterparts. Direct payments to all Americans, supporting American manufacturing of personal protection equipment (PPE), funding for childcare, nutritional assistance and agriculture support funding all have broad bipartisan support. We can pass these measures in a COVID relief package in short order, further closing the gap of differences still to hammer out between our House Majority and the Administration.

Finally, I must insist that the next package does not include special favors and handouts. The Heroes Act included many important policy provisions that would have helped everyone - but it also included handouts that had nothing to do with helping Americans during this crisis. By including things like tax breaks that overwhelmingly benefit the wealthy, \$100 million for chartered fishing, expanded PPP eligibility for big oil and pharmaceutical lobbying groups, we fail to demonstrate the focus the American people ask of us. To be clear, I am just as disappointed to see the Senate's HEALS Act include billions for a new FBI headquarters and expanded tax write-offs for businesses. If both sides could agree to dispense with these measures, I am confident we would be instantly closer to a final deal.

This is not a time for political games. We cannot say take it or leave it because we know very well at this point the Senate has already left it. We should pass a new piece of legislation that reflects our continued commitment to reaching a deal that will help Americans.

The lives and livelihoods of my constituents, and all Americans, are at stake.

Sincerely,



Cindy Axne
Member of Congress