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ASSISTANT TO THE MAJORITY WHIP

Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515-1802

March 12, 2020

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The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker of the House  
The Capitol H-232  
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Dear Speaker Pelosi,

According to public health experts, our nation faces a crisis in the days and weeks ahead. COVID-19 is spreading rapidly in our communities, causing both illness and uncertainty faster than we can keep up. In times like these, all levels of government must step up and provide leadership together. However, only the federal government has the resources the people of my district and our nation need. As House Democrats, it falls to us to lead this response and to make sure we get it right.

In that spirit, I am encouraged that you are leading our efforts and have developed a robust response that includes real benefits for the communities we represent. Provisions like paid leave for workers, expanded unemployment benefits, expanded SNAP benefits and protections, and free testing for everyone are important first steps to combating this public health crisis head on.

As someone representing a district that has serious outbreaks, I am seeing firsthand the strain this virus puts on our communities, our neighbors, and our economy. I am dedicated to making sure we get the public health aspects of our response right so that we can keep people safe and healthy and begin to truly limit the spread of COVID-19. However, I'm also concerned about the economic security and recovery of our communities and I believe we have to take action now to address that.

Two steps that we must implement to protect our communities are simple, but straightforward. First, we need to put money in the hands of those hurt by the economic disruption COVID-19 will cause, not just those officially fired or furloughed. This includes cafeteria workers at schools that close, people who work in arenas with no events, musicians

that have no place to play, waiters in empty restaurants, and people who still have to work and pay for childcare because school is canceled.

Direct cash assistance is the most effective way to help a person after a disaster and COVID-19 is truly a disaster with wide reach. Luckily, we have contemplated how to respond to disasters before with the Stafford Act. One thing is clear now, pandemics should be covered under the Stafford Act, and we should be responding to COVID-19 with all the resources the Stafford Act provides, including FEMA's Individual Assistance. This program, while imperfect and in need of expansion, is already set up to get money to people quickly after a disaster and can be used as a model right now. Direct cash payments are the only true way to make sure that we are providing support for everyone who truly needs it to make their mortgage payments, pay their rent, and buy groceries.

Second, we need to provide funds directly to our state and local governments. These governments, many of which are already cash-strapped, face dramatically increased responsibilities and demands on the resources they have now. They are burdened from carrying out public health and safety operations they have little experience executing. As they take on these challenges, it is unclear how long their resources will last. With many of our localities relying on sales tax to operate, they will be the first ones hit when COVID-19 begins to significantly impact how much people consume. They need funds block granted to them and they need them now.

While I don't believe that our spending during emergencies should be dependent on offsets, I offer a simple suggestion for where we could look for funding if it's needed. The tax breaks that President Trump and House Republicans gave to the richest among us should be rolled back to provide relief for the most vulnerable amongst us at this perilous time. I know for me the choice between keeping tax breaks for millionaires and helping working class Americans suffering from a pandemic is an easy one. The wealthiest should be paying their fair share all the time, but they should absolutely be paying their fair share in times of crisis. I believe we are in a crisis.

I hope you will seriously consider these proposals as we continue to work together to address COVID-19 and to protect the people and communities that we serve.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Cedric", with a stylized flourish extending from the end.

**Cedric L. Richmond**