EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

MIDDLE CLASS HEALTH BENEFITS TAX REPEAL ACT OF 2019

SPEECH OF

HON. JODY B. HICE

OF GEORGIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, March 27, 2020

Mr. HICE of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, the Federal Government has the responsibility to help individuals and businesses through this crisis because it is the government that shut down the economy—not American workers. Americans and their employers are not responsible for the economic damage being wrought by coronavirus, and I am pleased that the CARES Act will provide an unprecedented amount of immediate relief. However, I have deep concerns about this legislation, and I will be voting in opposition.

First, there has been absolutely no discussion on how we will ultimately pay for the trillions of dollars of new federal spending in this bill. As we incur this massive debt, we should be at least considering how we will one day pay it. The House has failed in its duty to take up consideration of this legislation by regular order. There has been no due diligence to review the language in detail within our committees, no opportunity to hear from expert witnesses regarding its effectiveness, and no option for our Members to address concerns or provide thoughtful solutions through the amendment process. Moreover, language within the bill willfully shirks our oversight authority and responsibility by waiving the open meetings requirement.

Furthermore, I fear this legislation is still just the tip of the iceberg. In a short period of time, we have moved from a few billion in phase one to over a hundred billion in phase two, and we now are considering $2.2 trillion in phase three. There is already talk of a fourth and fifth package to allow Democrats to advance many of their liberal partisan policies that did not make it into this bill during a time when no funding that is not directly related to crisis assistance should be considered. We must also weigh what precedents we are establishing. The CARES Act brings with it a massive expansion of the size and role of the Federal Government outside the scope of what our Founders intended. What we are doing here today is unsustainable and cannot be repeated for subsequent future emergencies that will undoubtedly and unfortunately occur. Maximum freedom exists within a context of limited government, and we have seen on countless occasions that once the Federal Government institutes new programs or spending that it is almost impossible to reverse the trajectory of its new footprint on our lives.

Secondly, while I am supportive of providing Americans a bridge of assistance through the coronavirus, I am concerned that this legislation will cause some to obtain significantly more in unemployment benefits than they would normally earn through their jobs, inadvertently incentivizing unemployment. We must strike a balance between smart health policy and smart economic policy, and that means Americans should be allowed to go back to work as soon as it's safe to do so. Unfortunately, the language in the bill creates a disincentive for many to return to the workforce over the next four months.

Third, it is unacceptable that Democrats have stuffed this bill with funding for agencies and causes completely unrelated to the coronavirus outbreak. Just to name a few, the bill contains within it $1 billion for Amtrak, $37 million to the Forest Service, $25 million for the Kennedy Center for Performing Arts, $75 million to the National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities and a combined $10.8 billion for several international development organizations. Many of these are fine institutions that do good work for our Nation, but they have no place in an emergency package aimed at rescuing American families and stimulating our economy during a time of crisis.

President Donald Trump has done an incredible job leading America through this crisis. We are blessed to have his leadership, and while I am unable to support this particular legislation, I look forward to continuing to support him and working with his Administration in combatting the coronavirus.

May God pour out his mercy and grace on our Nation during this time and heal our Land. God bless the great State of Georgia, and God bless America.

MIDDLE CLASS HEALTH BENEFITS TAX REPEAL ACT OF 2019

SPEECH OF

HON. JOHN SHIMKUS

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, March 27, 2020

Mr. SHIMKUS. Mr. Speaker, in my congressional career I've served during many challenging times. Each one required Members of Congress to understand the national crisis, appreciate the separation of powers, and know his or her district.

Some events were long and protracted like impeachment, but others, like 9/11 for example, hit like a lightning strike, unpredictable, powerful and life altering. The coronavirus outbreak is one of these events that struck out of the blue.

Yes, it started in China. Yes, the world was slow to understand its true danger. But even as the world scurries around in an attempt to mitigate its damage and slow its spread, the United States is rising to the challenge with unheard of speed—amazingly so during this time of divided chambers and divided government.

On March 4, the Coronavirus Preparedness and Response Supplemental Appropriation Act was signed into law. This quick response provided $4 billion to increase the availability of tests. $2.2 billion went to the Centers for Disease Control and $1 billion to state and local response efforts. It also jump-started public and private efforts toward developing a vaccine (which is already being tested).

On March 18, the Families First Coronavirus Response Act was signed into law. The bill's $2.5 billion ensured that the government would cover the cost of testing. Anyone becoming sick themselves, or needing to care for an infected loved one, would be entitled to paid leave. Food assistance was expanded for the needy. Some federal Unemployment Insurance requirements were also relaxed, making it easier to apply and quicker to receive benefits.

On March 27, the Coronavirus Aid and Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act will be signed into law. This bill directed cash assistance to most Americans. In my district, two-thirds of my constituents are eligible for the full amount and 97 percent of all households in my district should be eligible for some amount. For those who may not need this cash assistance for themselves, the bill also authorized a $300 charitable tax deduction whether a taxpayer itemizes or not.

To help ensure workers have jobs to return to, the CARES Act provided $500 billion to the Treasury Stabilization Fund to make loans, loan guarantees and other investments. To benefit, borrowers must maintain employment levels as March 24, 2020 and retain 90 percent of employees. The bill also directed $349 billion to the Small Business Administration's 7(a) Loan Program. These loans will be administered through local financial institutions and are available to eligible to small businesses, independent contractors, self employed individuals, nonprofits and veteran organizations.

Other notable provisions of the CARES Act included $100 billion for unreimbursed COVID–19 costs, $1.32 billion for community health centers, $15.5 billion for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (known more commonly as food stamps), $25 million for long distance learning and telemedicine through USDA Rural Development, and liability protection for medical device manufacturers. The provisions in the CARES Act are much more extensive than my short summary, and I would direct those interested in learning more about the bill to the Ways and Means Committee website.

It is always fashionable to look for someone to blame in these situations. Even within our legislative branch, Members have communicated for or against certain aspects of the response, whether for sincere policy objections or in hopes of gaining some local political benefit. Make no mistake, this always happens because it's part of our human nature. The Framers understood this well, and that's why our bicameral legislative branch creates its own checks on each Chamber. The Senate remains the cooling saucer of debate, just as Washington and Jefferson discussed more than two centuries ago.

In times like these, I'm thankful we have a constitutional republic under a federal system

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