



Solidarity House

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INTERNATIONAL UNION, UNITED AUTOMOBILE, AEROSPACE & AGRICULTURAL IMPLEMENT WORKERS OF AMERICA – UAW

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June 1, 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 Senate Majority Leader McConnell and Senate Minority Leader Schumer:

On behalf of the million active and retired members of the International Union, UAW, I respectfully urge you to approve the House-passed Health and Economic Recovery Omnibus Emergency Solutions (HEROES) Act as soon as possible.

We are living in extraordinary times as our great country faces a dual public health and economic crisis. Now, more than ever, working people need Congress to put partisan politics aside and take strong and immediate action to fight the spread of the deadly coronavirus and severe economic downturn. Strong and decisive measures are needed in order to create a pathway for a speedy, equitable and sustained economic recovery.

I commend Congress for coming together and passing four bipartisan bills in response to the pandemic. Unfortunately, the job is far from complete as fatalities mount and layoffs skyrocket. Over forty million people have filed for unemployment benefits since March. Although this is a global pandemic, not all countries have been impacted equally. While the United States has less than 5 percent of the world's population, we sadly have a third of the reported cases. Some would argue this is because the United States tests more people than any other countries. To the contrary, many industrialized nations have higher per capita testing rates. The federal government, thus far, has largely relegated its responsibility to protect American lives, leaving the nation's response to under-equipped state and local governments. This will not do. Our country needs a well-coordinated robust national plan consisting of scaled up testing, contact tracing and treatment to keep Americans safe at work and in our communities. Fixing the public health crisis is a prerequisite to solving our economic crisis. They are inescapably linked.

Responding to this deadly virus has caused widespread economic hardship, but that need not be the case. If enacted, the HEROES Act would mitigate the harm inflicted on workers, the economy and our communities and lay the groundwork for us to rebound from this crisis. The HEROES Act addresses the need for income support with unemployment insurance, direct financial support,

and subsidies for housing and food. It mandates a more robust, coordinated national response in fighting the virus. HEROES would require greater use of the Defense Production Act (DPA) to ensure we have the supplies we need to stop the spread of this pandemic. States would no longer be forced to bid against each other and the federal government to acquire emergency supplies. The HEROES Act protects and rewards workers by issuing much needed Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) standards for safe workplaces and begins to justly compensate workers for exposing themselves to the risk of the workplace by mandating premium pay for many front-line workers. It protects the health insurance of displaced workers by providing COBRA subsidies, provides special enrollment to Affordable Care Act exchanges, and increases the federal government's contributions to Medicaid because no American should go without coverage during a public health emergency. It helps save the post office and protects the fundamental right to vote. The legislation also shores up our first line of defense in this pandemic, state and local governments whose budgets are severely straining under the weight of this daily battle and shrinking revenue base.

During your deliberation, I urge the Senate to retain critical provisions from the HEROES Act, several of which are listed below:

- A strong, enforceable temporary OSHA standard: Since the onset of the pandemic, our union's top priority has been to protect the health and safety of working people. Unfortunately, our efforts have been hampered by a woefully inadequate response from OSHA. We need OSHA to issue a strong, enforceable temporary standard within seven days requiring all workplaces to develop and implement infection control plans based on CDC expertise, and preventing employers from retaliating against workers who report infection control problems. The Senate must ensure that workers feel safe at work; it will slow the spread of the virus, and support a sustained, safe re-start of the economy.
- Commit \$75 billion for testing, contact tracing, isolation measures, and free coronavirus testing funds and ensure greater utilization of the Defense of Production Act: The HEROES Act remedies the failure thus far to ensure the production and delivery of personal protective equipment (PPE) and other medical supplies.
- Healthcare: The HEROES Act addresses workers losing healthcare coverage by providing COBRA subsidies to cover the full cost of premiums to workers who have been laid off and/or reduced hours. HEROES also provide a special enrollment period in the Affordable Care Act (ACA) exchanges for the uninsured and expands federal assistance for Medicaid.
- Safety net: HEROES provide a lifeline to struggling families by extending weekly \$600 unemployment benefits through next January. It also ensures that Unemployment Insurance (UI) benefits are not used in means tests for SNAP and other benefits during the pandemic. HEROES also provide much needed funding in housing assistance and direct cash payments, to keep families afloat during uncertain economic times.
- Support for state and local government: States, localities, and territories are on the front lines everyday working to stop the spread of the virus, treat its victims, and provide essential services we all rely on. The HEROES Act dedicates roughly \$1 trillion to state, local, territorial and tribal governments who desperately need funds to pay first responders, health workers, and teachers who keep us safe and are in danger of losing their jobs. We

commend inclusion of Puerto Rico and other territories as they have been often overlooked by the federal government. It would be counterproductive to make such aid contingent on limiting the liability of employers.

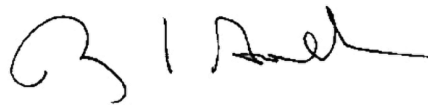
- Retirement security: HEROES provides relief for defined benefit pension plans that workers earned over a lifetime of work and are key to a dignified retirement. We urge the Senate to keep these provisions while simultaneously removing provisions from the GROW Act.

Restarting the economy is an immense challenge and the federal government's actions and leadership will be pivotal to a successful outcome. While the HEROES Act addresses many of the outstanding needs of Americans, there is still more work to be done. We urge the Senate to:

- Expand UI eligibility for adjunct professors and other workers struggling to make ends meet.
- Expand eligibility for premium pay that reflects the hazardous work conditions to workers in manufacturing and other industries that are so vital for the economy.
- Ensure all Defense Production Act contracts require worker protections such as health and safety standards, paid sick leave, enhanced health care and premium pay.
- Incentivize the purchase of U.S. made products and reform tax and trade policies to strengthen domestic supply chains to better prepare for future crisis.
- Reform our bankruptcy laws to protect workers' collective bargaining agreements and pensions; allow for student loan debt discharge; and protect working Americans' homes and vehicles.
- Support our post-secondary educational institutions to invest in research that is needed to create medicines and technologies of the future.

I urge you to support passage of the HEROES Act.

Sincerely,



Rory L. Gamble
UAW President