

Pandemic Recovery Plan





Dear Southwest Washingtonians,

We are in the midst of one of the most challenging crises in our nation's history. More than 180,000 Americans have been lost to a deadly virus that has ground our economy to a halt, thrown tens of millions out of work, and permanently shuttered more than 100,000 small businesses.¹ The disastrous effects of the COVID-19 pandemic will be felt for years, limiting opportunity, increasing inequality, and holding us back if not properly managed.

Our communities have rallied to fight this pandemic, wearing masks, practicing responsible social distancing, and putting lives on hold while banding together to do their part to halt the coronavirus' spread. Yet while everyday citizens have inspired with their determination and perseverance in the face of tragedy and hardship, the same cannot be said for our federal government.

No issue greater illustrates the urgent need for fresh leadership in the other Washington than D.C.'s inadequate response to this crisis. Our elected leaders left us unprepared for a threat about which they'd been repeatedly warned, resulting in a decade of cuts to public health programs because partisan politics and political expediency were given more importance than effective long-term planning.² Then, out of touch with what was occurring in our communities back home, they were slow to understand the severity of this crisis, and allowed their efforts to respond become watered down with partisan infighting and special interest handouts.

With tens of millions jobless and small businesses shuttered nationwide, Congress, with the support of our own Rep. Jaime Herrera Beutler,³ voted to create a \$500 billion slush fund for large corporations,⁴ while refusing to pass important priorities for working families such as a permanent program to guarantee paid sick leave to our workers. Stunningly, many of those same politicians are still working to overturn the Affordable Care Act,⁵ which could leave 23 million Americans without health care while a deadly virus rages onward.⁶

And today, despite tens of millions jobless, small businesses existing on life support, and our schools lacking the resources they need to responsibly re-open, Congress can't even be bothered to do its job and pass badly-needed new relief measures that will extend

¹ ["Small business used to define America's economy. The pandemic could change that forever." Washington Post, 5/12/20](#)

² ["How Tea Party Budget Battles Left the National Emergency Medical Stockpile Unprepared for Coronavirus." Pro Publica, 4/3/20](#)

³ ["Jaime Herrera Beutler Applauds Passage of Phase 3 Coronavirus Relief Package." Rep. Jamie Herrera Beutler, 3/27/20](#)

⁴ ["As White House pushes firms to reopen, new report says much of bailout stimulus money remains unspent." Washington Post, 5/18/20](#)

⁵ ["Explaining Texas v. U.S.: A Guide to the Case Challenging the ACA." Kaiser Family Foundation, 3/10/20](#)

⁶ ["The Health Care Repeal Lawsuit Could Strip Coverage from 23 Million Americans." Center for American Progress, 6/24/20](#)

expanded unemployment benefits and protect our students and teachers to get kids back in class, among other critical priorities.

It's time to end these political games and special interest influence and restore competent leadership to D.C. that will trust in science and put working families and our Southwest Washington communities first.

We must both pass the emergency short-term relief measures needed to keep families and businesses afloat and begin planning our recovery from this pandemic *now*. Our workers, small businesses, and the families that depend on them must be able to return to an economy primed to thrive. But that will not happen if D.C. doesn't learn the harsh lessons taught by this crisis and put in place effective policy to make sure that we are never left unprepared for such a threat again.

Congress must immediately pass an extension of expanded unemployment benefits on which millions were relying to get by. It must pass dire relief funding for our schools so we can re-open them in a safe manner that will keep our students and teachers healthy and allow parents to get back to work.

Then we need to jumpstart our economy with transformational investments in our infrastructure that will create jobs now and put the conditions in place for future growth – from rebuilding our crumbling roads and bridges to expanding high-speed broadband to every community in Southwest Washington. We must invest in recovery programs for our small businesses and protect them from predatory debt collectors so that they can grow and thrive when our economy fully reopens. We will prioritize our workers by expanding access to job training programs that allow them to boost their careers, raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour so every full time worker can support their family, and making paid sick leave and affordable child care a reality, rather than an out-of-reach aspiration, for all. And we'll put in place strong oversight of recovery programs so that critical investments and funds are not lost to fraud or eaten up by large corporations powered by D.C. lobbyists at the expense of small businesses.

At the same time, we'll work to strengthen our health care system by protecting the Affordable Care Act and the critical benefits for workers it provides and creating a public option that guarantees affordable health care to every American, while preserving the option to keep one's private insurance if they prefer. We'll boost public health funding and programs to ensure we are prepared for future threats and invest in our rural hospitals to ensure every Southwest Washingtonian has access to quality health care providers, no matter where they live. Perhaps most importantly, we must make access to testing, treatment, and an eventual vaccine for COVID-19 and future pandemics available to every American that needs it free of charge, so drug company profits don't come before our ability to defeat and deadly pandemic.

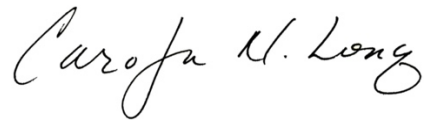
We will not recover from this crisis if we continue to succumb to the politically expedient, self-interested decision making that has seen us fare worse than nearly every other wealthy nation on earth in our fight against this pandemic. We need bold, transformational leadership and elected representatives who are unafraid to make the hard choices that spur real change. And we must emerge from this moment putting into

action a plan to not only get our country back on track, but to tackle many of the urgent challenges we already faced, from rising income inequality, to lack of economic opportunity in our rural areas, and to the longstanding inequities spurred by the systemic racism faced by our Black, Brown and Indigenous communities – which have been hit disproportionately hard by this crisis.

We have suffered through months of tragedy, despair, and heartbreak, yet together we can emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic powered by a strong economic recovery that spurs a more equal, fair and just America.

I hope you will join me in this fight.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carolyn N. Long". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Carolyn Long

Mission: Build the conditions for a robust recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that yields a stronger and more just America, while preventing this calamity from ever happening again

1. Get Working Families and Businesses Back on Their Feet and Set the Stage for Future Growth	2
A. Extend the unemployment insurance expansion.....	2
B. Give our schools the resources they need to reopen safely	3
C. Invest in our infrastructure to increase employment and stimulate economic growth.....	3
D. Strengthen and prioritize our small business recovery – Putting Main Street before Wall Street.....	5
E. Invest in job training for those out of work or employed in industries negatively affected by the pandemic.....	6
F. Increase the minimum wage to \$15 an hour	6
G. Ensure affordable child care for all families and a robust child care industry, while expanding to universal Pre-K.....	7
H. Expand paid sick and family leave.....	9
I. Impose a moratorium on consumer and small business debt collection – including student loan debt – for the duration of this crisis	9
J. Ensure strong oversight of recovery funding to ensure aid goes where it’s needed most.	10
2. Strengthen Our Public Health System and Guarantee Every American Has Access to Affordable Health Care Coverage and Access to Quality Care, to Prevent the Next Pandemic	10
A. Protect the Affordable Care Act and create a public option that will provide quality and affordable health coverage to any American that wants it.....	11
B. Strengthen our rural health care system, and protect rural hospitals	13
C. Boost public health funding and responsibly manage infectious disease programs to ensure we are prepared for future threats and to stop the next pandemic before it starts.....	14

1. Get Working Families and Businesses Back on Their Feet and Set the Stage for Future Growth

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have been devastating to working families and small businesses all across our region. We lost an unprecedented half a million jobs in a single month¹ leaving hundreds of thousands of families without a source of income, while tens of thousands of businesses have been forced to halt operations. Nationwide, more than 100,000 small businesses are projected to close their doors for good,² destroying the dreams of countless entrepreneurs whose local restaurants, coffee shops, hardware stores, or markets comprised the backbone of their communities. We'll feel this damage for years.

From the depths of this crisis, we must emerge ready to enact smart and effective policies that get Southwest Washingtonians back on their feet while setting the stage for future growth. We can no longer afford for our elected leaders to kick the can down the road and succumb to the easy political decisions that help their careers; it's time for bold action and strong leadership that will help rebuild our country and extend a hand up to the millions of families suffering from this pandemic.

A. Extend the unemployment insurance expansion

As tens of millions lost their jobs due to the economic shutdown imposed to reduce the spread of COVID-19, Congress passed an expansion of unemployment benefits for those laid off through no fault of their own, which has kept millions of working families afloat. The program was a rare success story preventing tens of millions from falling into poverty.³ Yet today, with no end to the economic effects of the pandemic in sight, the program has been allowed to expire by a Congress more interested in playing partisan politics than helping families.

That's simply unacceptable.

While ensuring we do not incentivize workers to remain unemployed rather than return to work, we must extend this expanded program for those who do not yet have the option of returning to their previous job and have yet to find new work.

These benefits not only provide a critical lifeline to families that would otherwise struggle to get by, they are also an important way to support our small businesses by boosting consumer spending at a time when budgets would be even tighter without them. By extending these expanded benefits, we can keep our economy functioning at a higher level and prime the pump for a faster recovery for workers and businesses alike when we finally defeat this virus.

¹ Bureau of Labor Statistics, March-April 2020 Non-Farm Employment

² ["Small business used to define America's economy. The pandemic could change that forever." Washington Post, 5/12/20](#)

³ ["Vast Federal Aid Has Capped Rise in Poverty, Studies Find." New York Times, 6/21/19](#)

B. Give our schools the resources they need to reopen safely

One of the most important and difficult decisions our communities have faced during this crisis has been whether and how to reopen schools so students can resume in person learning and many parents are freed from the near impossible demands of attempting to juggle child care and work. As the parent of a Clark County public school student, I can attest firsthand to the need to get students back in class as soon as it is safe to do so.

Decisions on re-opening are difficult, complex, and must be left to local school districts to decide what is best and safest for them using all available science and data – and most importantly free from political pressure. However, Congress has neglected its duty to adequately support our school districts by ensuring they have the resources needed to reopen schools both in person safely when the time comes, and remotely.

For remote school, that means providing funding for hotspots and WiFi as well as devices for students to access their classes. For in person instruction, it will require proper funding for protective gear, teaching tools, and disinfectant supplies, as well as the proper safety measures and cleaning procedures. Our school districts aren't set up to handle these additional resource demands alone. While Congress did include some funding for K-12 schools in the CARES Act in March, it wasn't nearly enough, and in many places has long since been used up.

The federal government must assist with relief funding that ensures all our schools can put proper safety measures in place; without this aid, we are significantly delaying the point at which students can return and be on even footing.

This situation is made even more enraging by the fact that all sides in D.C. agree that this funding is both necessary and extremely urgent.⁴ Yet they have been consumed by partisan politics, unable to come together to actually get things done.

A pandemic is no place to be putting partisanship over people. Our schools need help now, and it is long past time they received it.

C. Invest in our infrastructure to increase employment and stimulate economic growth

Our infrastructure is the lifeblood of our economy and our communities. A strong network of roads and bridges not only connects our towns and neighborhoods but ensures businesses and manufacturers can benefit from quick and efficient movement of goods. A robust broadband network that extends fast internet access to all allows our businesses to thrive, our students to access their education, and anyone anywhere to access health care via telehealth – tools that have become a lifeline in the midst of this devastating pandemic. And, our ports rail, and air connections move the goods we make right here to markets across the globe.

⁴ ["Congress's Ideological Divide Has Stymied Aid for Pandemic-Stricken Schools," New York Times, 8/6/20](#)

Strong investment in our infrastructure creates jobs, increases quality of life for our residents, and spurs business growth. The Congressional Budget Office has found that each dollar of infrastructure investment we make returns \$2.20 in gains to our economy.⁵

Yet despite this clear imperative, a broken Congress has underfunded our infrastructure for a generation – and that neglect is hurting us here in Southwest Washington.

The American Society of Civil Engineers gives our state a C- grade for our roads, and finds that nearly 400 of our bridges are structurally deficient.⁶ Nearly 5,000 of our bridges are in need of some type of repair.⁷ And after years of gridlock that increases commute times and holds our economy back, and lack of leadership from the incumbent, Congress has failed to replace the I-5 bridge.

The story is similar for access to broadband internet – particularly here in Southwest Washington. While the Seattle-Tacoma region to our north is home to the most cutting-edge tech companies in the world, down here in the 3rd district, too many have been left behind.

In Skamania and Klickitat counties, roughly a third of residents lack access to high-speed internet of at least 25 megabits (mbps) per second, while Lewis County fares only slightly better.⁸ Eighty percent of Wahkiakum county residents lack such access – the second worst rate of any county in the state.⁹

This neglect is irresponsible and takes a toll on our economy and our quality of life every single day.

Comprehensive and transformational infrastructure investment that will rebuild our region and countless others across the country must be the cornerstone of any plan to get us moving again in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

By repairing our crumbling roads and bridges – and finally replacing the I-5 bridge – we will create good jobs in the short term, while extending the conditions that set the stage for growth throughout Southwest Washington. By guaranteeing high-speed broadband internet access to every resident or business, no matter where they live, we’ll make it easier for entrepreneurs in rural communities to start a business or expand their existing one, connect those in small towns to the online ecosystem, and even increase property values and spur millions in economic benefits.¹⁰

If we make smart investments now, we can help Southwest Washingtonians get back on their feet faster and ensure the conditions are in place for our economy to thrive in the future – particularly in our rural regions.

⁵ [“Estimated Impact of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act on Employment and Economic Output in 2014.” Congressional Budget Office, February 2015](#)

⁶ [“Report Card for Washington’s Infrastructure.” American Society of Civil Engineers, 2019](#)

⁷ [“Report Card for Washington’s Infrastructure.” American Society of Civil Engineers, 2019](#)

⁸ [“INTERNET ACCESS IN WASHINGTON.” Broadband Now](#)

⁹ [“INTERNET ACCESS IN WASHINGTON.” Broadband Now](#)

¹⁰ [“Measuring Impact of Broadband in 5 Rural MN Communities.” Blandin Foundation, October 2017](#)

In Congress, I will work with anyone to cut through the partisan gridlock and “go along to get along” attitude that has paralyzed our elected leaders from taking action in this critical area for decades.

It’s long past time to pass a transformational infrastructure investment program, and we can pay for it by replacing the Trump tax package that cost nearly \$2 trillion,¹¹ while sending 83% of its benefits to the top 1 percent¹² and allowing wealthy corporations to get away without paying taxes,¹³ with fair tax reform that prioritizes relief to working families, levels the playing field for small businesses, and ensures the wealthy and large corporations pay their fair share.

D. Strengthen and prioritize our small business recovery – Putting Main Street before Wall Street

A strong and robust economic recovery hinges on the ability of our small business community to get back on its feet and regain its vitality once this crisis ends. Yet this critical sector has been hit hardest by the COVID-19 pandemic, with more than an estimated 100,000 small businesses nationwide forced to close their doors for good.¹⁴ Small businesses here in Washington suffered an average revenue loss of roughly 50 percent compared to January of this year before the pandemic hit.¹⁵ We must prioritize small businesses and local entrepreneurs throughout our efforts to rescue our economy and create the conditions for a return to prosperity – without them, not only our economy, but the very fabric of our communities will suffer.

That starts with both funding key programs to help small businesses stay afloat and ensuring they work effectively, and disbursing aid where it’s needed most.

While the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) passed by Congress focuses on keeping workers employed, it is not always the most effective tool for small businesses and entrepreneurs that have few employees, yet still provide critical economic benefits to their communities. Furthermore, its application process can be long, arduous, confusing, and out of reach for many small businesses. And it often fails to get assistance where it can make a difference fast enough. Programs such as the Economic Injury Disaster Loan Program (EIDL) and the Small Business Administration Microloan Program can provide greater flexibility for small businesses to receive the help they need to weather this crisis, while getting them that aid more quickly and in a more efficiently targeted manner.

Through early May, Washington state ranked as one of the worst states in the country for PPP processing rates, meaning businesses here were having trouble receiving assistance through that program.¹⁶ By boosting funding for the EIDL and Microloan programs, we can get help to the small businesses that need it in time to keep them afloat.

¹¹ [“GOP tax law will add \\$1.9 trillion to debt: CBO.” The Hill, 4/9/18](#)

¹² [“The Republican tax bill got worse: now the top 1% gets 83% of the gains.” Vox, 12/18/17](#)

¹³ [“60 Fortune 500 Companies Avoided All Federal Income Tax in 2018 Under New Tax Law.” Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, 4/11/19](#)

¹⁴ [“Small business used to define America’s economy. The pandemic could change that forever.” Washington Post, 5/12/20](#)

¹⁵ [“In many of the hardest-hit states, COVID-19 small business relief is lagging.” Brookings, 5/21/20](#)

¹⁶ [“In many of the hardest-hit states, COVID-19 small business relief is lagging.” Brookings, 5/21/20](#)

Small businesses are also bearing heavy burdens from this crisis even when their operations remain strong. We should create a tax credit for small businesses to purchase protective gear and sanitizing equipment to keep their workforces safe and remain in operation in accordance with local health regulations, as a bipartisan group of lawmakers has proposed.¹⁷

E. Invest in job training for those out of work or employed in industries negatively affected by the pandemic

Tragically, the COVID-19 pandemic has reshaped our economy, devastating entire industries and costing millions of jobs. We must ensure that those out of work or adversely affected – as well as anyone seeking to better their skills – has access to the job training and technical education programs that will allow them to learn a new trade or expand their existing knowledge to transition to a more secure field.

Here in Washington we have a robust and growing clean energy industry employing over 80,000 workers,¹⁸ a world-class technology sector, and a strong climate for entrepreneurs, yet we’re not seeing the impact of these assets enough in our corner of the state. We must empower Southwest Washingtonians with the skills needed to fill open jobs in growth areas, so that as the pandemic recedes, affected workers are ready to get back on their feet and we attract companies and jobs here.

Earlier this year, a bipartisan group of Senators introduced legislation to offer a \$4,000 refundable tax credit that any worker laid off during our current crisis could apply toward skills training programs through the end of next year.¹⁹ This is an important start that would allow those out of work to immediately begin job training programs that will supply the skills to re-enter our economy for the long term. We must ensure that such programs include registered apprenticeships and technical education options that give young people the opportunity to learn skills that will last them a lifetime.

We then need to build on this initiative with sustained investments in career and technical education programs, like Cascadia Technical Institute, that will strengthen job training opportunities for the future and ensure they remain accessible to all workers seeking a boost.

This must include a particular focus on the burgeoning health care field – in which job opportunities were growing rapidly even before the current pandemic – so that nursing, home health, and senior care education programs that certify workers for jobs in those areas are available to Southwest Washingtonians.

F. Increase the minimum wage to \$15 an hour

It’s simple – in the year 2020, every American who works full time should receive a wage on which they can support their family. Here in Washington, our state government has made progress in increasing our

¹⁷ [HR 7216, 116th Congress](#)

¹⁸ [“Clean Jobs Washington 2019.” E2, 12/18/19](#)

¹⁹ [S.3779 - Skills Renewal Act, 116th Congress](#)

statewide minimum wage to \$13.50 an hour – increasing economic security for 16,000 workers.²⁰ Yet in D.C., Congress has yet again fallen down on the job. In the wake of the crushing economic pain caused by this pandemic, it's time to put partisan politics aside and pass a \$15 minimum wage nationwide that will take effect once the pandemic is over.

The non-partisan Congressional Budget Office has forecast that such an increase would raise wages for up to 27 million Americans, while lifting 1.3 million above the poverty line.²¹ Women, who are disproportionately likely to be minimum wage workers²² even though they are often a family's primary breadwinners, would particularly benefit, helping to reduce the gender wage gap which still sees women earn only 72.5 cents on the dollar here in the 3rd district.²³ And our businesses would benefit from the increased consumer spending spurred by wage increases for tens of millions.

Furthermore, as Washington's current minimum wage of \$13.50 an hour ranks higher than our neighbors in Oregon, as well as most other states, a standardized federal rate will increase the competitiveness of our business climate, making our region more attractive for entrepreneurs.

This increase must be implemented in a manner that does not overly burden our small businesses, which are integral to our communities. We need to look carefully at our tax code and couple a minimum wage increase with targeted tax credits for small businesses that will allow them to remain fiscally sound while boosting pay for their workers, as was done in 2007 when federal legislation was passed to raise the minimum wage.²⁴

We must speed up our economic recovery from the COVID-19 shutdowns in every responsible way we can, and giving millions a pay increase that will ensure they can pay their bills while stimulating economic growth through a \$15 nationwide minimum wage will benefit all of us here in Southwest Washington.

G. Ensure affordable child care for all families and a robust child care industry, while expanding to universal Pre-K

As any working parent with children stuck at home the past few months knows, our economic recovery hinges on the ability to secure quality and affordable child care for working families. This lack of access to such care was a serious crisis before this pandemic hit, and was not isolated to any county in Southwest Washington. From Klickitat to Pacific and Lewis to Clark, everyone lacked access to affordable child care. Now, with providers struggling to survive the shutdowns and declining enrollment brought by COVID-19, the industry is on the brink of full-blown disaster. And our elected leaders are not doing enough to help schools safely reopen in the fall – further compounding the problem.

²⁰ ["Characteristics of minimum wage workers, 2019." Bureau of Labor Statistics](#)

²¹ ["The Effects on Employment and Family Income of Increasing the Federal Minimum Wage." Congressional Budget Office, 7/8/19](#)

²² ["The Effects on Employment and Family Income of Increasing the Federal Minimum Wage." Congressional Budget Office, 7/8/19](#)

²³ ["The Fight for Pay Equity: A State Road Map for Washington." American Association of University Women, September 2019](#)

²⁴ ["Congress Passes Increase in the Minimum Wage." New York Times, 5/25/07](#)

The pandemic has forced sixty percent of providers to shutter at least temporarily,²⁵ while the Center for American Progress has warned that nearly 4.5 million child care slots could be permanently lost due to providers going out of business.²⁶ If we don't protect our child care industry, parents simply won't be able to return to work at full capacity, forcing millions of families to fall behind economically and countless businesses to suffer from lost productivity. Our economy simply won't be able to function.

We must take action to ensure providers are able to weather this crisis and stay afloat, and that we solve our affordability gap for the long term.

That starts with expanding support for child care programs at risk of closure through the Child Care Development Block Grant program. Congress has already spent hundreds of billions bailing out big corporations,²⁷ so we can spare a tiny fraction of that amount to ensure the viability of a critical service on which our economy depends – one comprised mostly of small businesses owned locally by members of the community.

Then we must tackle the structural affordability crisis that burdens working parents with child care costs that are simply unsustainable. According to the federal Department of Health and Human Services, working families with children who have not reached public kindergarten spend an average of nearly 10 percent of their income on care – well above the HHS definition of seven percent of income as “affordable” and an increase of 11 percent since 2013.²⁸ For low-income families, that ratio is even higher – up to a third of family income.²⁹ In a majority of states, annual costs for child care are higher than that for college tuition.³⁰

No Washingtonian should have to choose between their career and starting a family, yet this lack of affordable care makes it harder for young people to have children, and punishes them when they do. That's disastrous for our communities, for our economy, and for families themselves.

In Congress, I'll make solutions for ensuring affordable child care a top priority, and I'll be willing to work with anyone in either party to get that done. That could include grant programs for local providers in child care deserts to increase options and reduce costs for working parents. And it must include working toward the eventual goal of extending access to high-quality universal public Pre-K for all Americans – which not only frees working parents from finding full-time child care for three and four year-olds, but also comes with a host of benefits for children, including documented boosts to educational outcomes and shrunken achievement gaps.³¹

This is another critical area that we can fund through passing comprehensive tax reform that ensures the wealthy and large corporations pay their fair share and invests in the middle class.

²⁵ ["Nationwide Survey: Child Care in the Time of Coronavirus." Bipartisan Policy Center, 4/10/20](#)

²⁶ ["Coronavirus Pandemic Could Lead to Permanent Loss of Nearly 4.5 Million Child Care Slots." Center for American Progress, 4/24/20](#)

²⁷ ["The corporate bailout doesn't include the limits Democrats promised." Politico, 4/2/20](#)

²⁸ ["Working Families Are Spending Big Money on Child Care." Center for American Progress, 6/20/19](#)

²⁹ ["Working Families Are Spending Big Money on Child Care." Center for American Progress, 6/20/19](#)

³⁰ ["Childcare Costs More Than College Tuition in 28 U.S. States." Fortune, 10/22/18](#)

³¹ ["The Good News About Educational Inequality." Sean F. Reardon, Jane Waldfogel and Daphna Basso, New York Times, 8/26/16](#)

H. Expand paid sick and family leave

It is unconscionable that the United States is one of only three high-income countries in the world that refuses to guarantee paid sick leave to our workers.³² This was an untenable situation that hurt working families before our current crisis hit; it then caused even greater damage in the early days of the spread of COVID-19 as workers were forced to choose between keeping their family afloat and risking their lives amidst a dangerous virus. If sick workers are unable to stay home and self isolate, it increases viral spread through workplaces, helping this pandemic rage out of control.

Congress partially addressed this situation in the short term, passing legislation that offers two weeks of paid sick leave to those who have contracted or have had family members contract COVID-19, yet the legislation still exempted millions of workers and is set to expire when our current pandemic ends.³³

We need a permanent program to ensure paid sick and family leave to American workers that will keep our families healthy and safe without running the risk of falling behind due to lost income from an illness. And we need to do it in a way that provides flexibility for small businesses and does not overburden them with excessive regulations that harm their ability to thrive. By working together with both Republicans and Democrats, we can bring all ideas to the table and craft the best policy for our families.

This program will be critical, not only to ensure a humane option for workers to recover from an illness or take care of a sick child or family member, but also to help businesses increase productivity through a healthier workforce. And it will be important to fight and prevent future pandemics by allowing workers to stay home when sick, preventing them from infecting others and restricting the spread of viruses and illness in our communities.

I. Impose a moratorium on consumer and small business debt collection – including student loan debt – for the duration of this crisis

It's simple - workers and businesses who have been devastated by this crisis should be able to devote their resources and efforts to getting back on their feet so they can fuel our economic recovery, rather than being hounded by predatory debt collection. We must prevent debt collectors from taking advantage of this crisis through increased interest rates and fees, asset freezes, wage garnishments, or legal actions that cost consumers time and money. This effort should also include an extension of the freeze on federal student loan payments and interest beyond its current expiration in March 2021.

Our small businesses and working families did not cause this pandemic, and they don't deserve to be taken advantage of by debt collection firms seeking to turn a quick profit. Protecting them in this time of economic hardship will strengthen economic security for working families, while better positioning workers and businesses to recover when this crisis ends.

³² ["I suffer through it': how US workers cope without paid sick leave." The Guardian, 1/31/20](#)

³³ ["Millions of American workers are left out of the coronavirus paid leave bill." Vox, 3/17/20](#)

J. Ensure strong oversight of recovery funding to ensure aid goes where it's needed most.

We must ensure strong oversight is in place on the trillions of dollars in spending allocated by Congress to fight the COVID-19 pandemic so that resources go to the individuals and small businesses for which it is intended, rather than being siphoned off by large corporations and their armies of lobbyists, to politically connected special interests, or fraudsters. The CARES Act included a \$500 billion corporate slush fund that the Trump administration is given great latitude to use as it sees fit,³⁴ while a massive Federal Reserve program to infuse cash into large corporations does not even ban these companies from laying off workers or giving bonuses to their top executives amidst this crisis.³⁵

Already, the federal Government Accountability Office has called the Trump administration's current oversight efforts insufficient, declaring that there is "significant risk" that "fraudulent or inflated [loan] applications were approved."³⁶ Meanwhile the Treasury Department's Inspector General for Tax Administration has found that nearly 1.1 million economic stimulus payments were improperly sent to deceased individuals, wasting nearly \$1.4 billion.³⁷

Yet despite the clear need for a strong oversight program to prevent waste, fraud, and abuse, Rep. Herrera Beutler has chosen to play partisan political games and voted against such an effort.³⁸

When federal resources go to the politically connected or executive bonuses, instead of to the small businesses and individuals that need it the most, our economy and our workers all suffer. In Congress, I'll fight for strong oversight of all federal economic relief efforts to ensure our small businesses and workers get the help they deserve.

2. Strengthen Our Public Health System and Guarantee Every American Has Access to Affordable Health Care Coverage and Access to Quality Care, to Prevent the Next Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a crisis made worse by consistent failures of leadership from those charged with protecting our communities at the federal level. Both over the early months of 2020 when the federal government did too little, too late to manage and contain the spread of the novel coronavirus to the preceding decade in which Congress and our elected leaders repeatedly failed, despite clear warnings, to prepare us to face exactly such a pandemic have greatly deepened the severity of this crisis and cost countless lives.

³⁴ ["As White House pushes firms to reopen, new report says much of bailout stimulus money remains unspent." Washington Post, 5/18/20](#)

³⁵ ["The U.S. plans to lend \\$500 billion to large companies. It won't require them to preserve jobs or limit executive pay." Washington Post, 4/28/20](#)

³⁶ ["COVID-19: Opportunities to Improve Federal Response and Recovery Efforts." Government Accountability Office, 6/25/20](#)

³⁷ ["COVID-19: Opportunities to Improve Federal Response and Recovery Efforts." Government Accountability Office, 6/25/20](#)

³⁸ [Vote #103, H Res 938, 4/23/20](#)

Members of both parties share ample blame, including Rep. Herrera Beutler who, along with many of her colleagues in D.C., has consistently put short-term partisan politics and politically expedient decision-making ahead of the tough choices we needed to truly prepare our country for this event.

After our nation’s medical supply reserve in the Strategic National Stockpile was depleted following the H1N1 epidemic in the late 2000s, Rep. Herrera Beutler voted twice^{39 40} to cut funding for these critical supplies as Congress underfunded the stockpile by more than \$300 million over several years⁴¹ – funding that would have secured critical protective gear for medical workers and ventilators that would be saving lives today.

Rep. Herrera Beutler chose to play partisan politics and voted to eliminate the Center for Disease Control’s Prevention and Public Health Fund which is one of the primary funders of public health infrastructure in communities across the country.⁴² And when that failed, she went right along with politicians of both parties in voting to cut its funding by billions because it was politically expedient to do so.⁴³

And when this current crisis struck, Herrera Beutler was asleep at the wheel like most of D.C., failing to even comment on the threat of COVID-19 until early March⁴⁴ – six weeks after the virus came to Washington and started to spread in our communities.⁴⁵ While leaders such as Sen. Patty Murray sounded the alarm and took action early, Herrera Beutler simply wasn’t in touch with what was happening back home in Washington.

We can never again allow self-interested elected leaders to put our health, our safety, and our livelihoods at risk due to neglect and a failure to lead. It’s long past time for bold, transformational thinking that can enact the policies and reforms needed to ensure we are never left unprepared again.

A. Protect the Affordable Care Act and create a public option that will provide quality and affordable health coverage to any American that wants it

Protect the Affordable Care Act from attempts to overturn or sabotage it

While far from perfect, the Affordable Care Act has made great strides in extending access to care to more Americans. Thanks to this progress, those with pre-existing conditions are protected by discrimination from insurance companies, more than 20 million Americans have health insurance who didn’t before, health care options and coverage in rural areas has been strengthened, particularly through the expansion of the Medicaid program, children can stay on their parents insurance until they’re 26, and women can no longer be charged more than men for the same coverage.⁴⁶ Without this law, and the

³⁹ [House Vote #268, Passage of HR 1473, 4/14/11](#)

⁴⁰ [House Vote #941, Passage of HR 2055, 12/16/11](#)

⁴¹ [“How Tea Party Budget Battles Left the National Emergency Medical Stockpile Unprepared for Coronavirus.” Pro Publica, 4/3/20](#)

⁴² [House Vote #568, Passage of HR 3762, 10/23/15](#)

⁴³ [House Vote #72, Agreeing to Conf. Report HR 3630, 2/17/12; House Vote #592, Concurring to Sen. Amdt. HR 34, 11/30/16; House Vote #708, Concurring to Sen. Amdt. HR 1370, 12/21/17](#)

⁴⁴ [@HerreraBuetler Tweet, 3/2/20](#)

⁴⁵ [“First Travel-Related Case of 2019 Novel Coronavirus Detected In United States.” Center for Disease Control & Prevention, 1/21/20](#)

⁴⁶ [“10 Ways the ACA Has Improved Health Care in the Past Decade.” Center for American Progress, 3/23/20](#)

benefits to public health it has spurred, we would be faring even worse in our efforts to fight this pandemic.

Yet currently, Republican Attorneys General are seeking to repeal the landmark health law through a lawsuit seeking to have it ruled unconstitutional.⁴⁷ Rep. Herrera Beutler, who has bragged that she has “voted more than 80 times to repeal the ACA,”⁴⁸ has voted multiple times in support of this lawsuit.^{49 50} If the Supreme Court rules in favor of Republican opponents of the ACA, the results will be disastrous – a projected 654,000 Washingtonians could lose their health coverage in the midst of a deadly pandemic, while 23 million would be at risk nationwide.⁵¹ Insurance companies would once again be permitted to deny coverage to those with pre-existing conditions – which could include COVID-19 in the future. Americans would lose mandated coverage for essential health benefits such as maternity care or substance abuse and mental health treatment. And women and seniors not yet on Medicare could be charged more for the same care.

While insurance companies would profit, this will devastate countless working families who would lose access to care and be at risk of going into massive debt if they face serious medical issues without insurance coverage. And even beyond that critical issue, it threatens all of us. If we have hundreds of thousands of people in our communities lacking health coverage, those individuals will be less likely to see a doctor, seek medical attention, or get tested if they become sick. That exacerbates the spread of COVID-19 and makes it harder for us to fight future pandemics.

Sadly, Republican attempts to damage the Affordable Care Act don’t end with this lawsuit. The Trump administration has sought to sabotage the law by ending payments intended to reduce the cost of coverage,⁵² and by cutting funding for outreach programs to enroll more Americans in health care.⁵³

Attempts to damage the potential for Americans to receive quality and affordable care and to overturn the Affordable Care Act and force millions to lose their care are simply unethical, unconscionable, and unacceptable. In Congress, I’ll fight against them to keep Americans safe and healthy.

Create a low-deductible public option that allows Americans to buy into a Medicare-like plan, while allowing them to keep their private insurance if they choose

Merely protecting the Affordable Care Act is not enough – if we want to have any hope of preventing the next pandemic and fulfilling the ideal that health care is a human right, we must ensure that every single American has access to quality and affordable health care. It’s time to pass a low-cost low deductible public option that will give Americans of all ages the choice to buy into a quality health care plan similar to Medicare, while allowing those who like their current private insurance to remain on their existing plan and keep their existing doctors.

⁴⁷ [“Explaining Texas v. U.S.: A Guide to the Case Challenging the ACA.” Kaiser Family Foundation, 3/10/20](#)

⁴⁸ [“In Our View: Weighing in on Health Care.” Editorial Board, The Columbian, 9/4/18](#)

⁴⁹ [House Vote #19, On Agreeing to Title III of H Res 6, 1/9/19](#)

⁵⁰ [House Vote #146, On Agreeing to H Res 271, 4/3/19](#)

⁵¹ [“The Health Care Repeal Lawsuit Could Strip Coverage from 23 Million Americans.” Center for American Progress, 6/24/20](#)

⁵² [“Trump Decision to End Insurance Subsidies Sparks Outrage, Lawsuits.” NPR, 10/14/17](#)

⁵³ [“Trump’s Cuts to Health Law Enrollment Efforts Are Hitting Hard.” New York Times, 10/9/17](#)

A public option program can boost affordability by using the scale and purchasing power of large enrollments to negotiate prices with providers to reduce costs and increase efficiency. It will increase competition in the marketplace by introducing a lower-cost option that private insurers must compete with – benefiting consumers who choose to stay on their existing plan by reducing premiums. It will improve health outcomes – and cut costs – by boosting access to preventive care, keeping us healthier and reducing the number of health procedures needed. And it will decouple health insurance from employment, freeing small businesses from the administrative burdens of running health care plans for their employees and boosting entrepreneurship by giving individuals the freedom to take risks and start their own business without having to worry about how they'll afford health care for their family.

Already, 5.4 million Americans have lost their health insurance during this crisis, with most of those newly uninsured stemming from a loss of employment.⁵⁴ Allowing those Americans to buy into Medicare will get those individuals who choose into an affordable and accessible health plan that won't leave them uninsured.

Moving toward universal health care through a public option will improve our health care system from top to bottom while ensuring all Americans have access to quality and affordable care. It will also reduce health disparities by ensuring better access to quality care in our Black and Brown communities, which have been hit disproportionately hard by this pandemic after generations of inequality and discrimination.

Furthermore, beyond fulfilling the key value of health care as a human right, this a public option is also a critical goal as we seek to prevent future pandemics and public health disasters by keeping our population healthier with access to treatment options when crisis strikes.

B. Strengthen our rural health care system, and protect rural hospitals

Even before our current crisis hit, our rural health care system was struggling. Too many rural communities across Washington lack access to key health care providers, while the critical access hospitals that serve these areas have seen revenue reductions that have put many at risk. Many communities in Southwest Washington face drives of over an hour to their nearest critical access hospital. And a 2019 study found that 15 percent of such hospitals in Washington were at high financial risk of closure.⁵⁵

Paradoxically, despite straining hospital capacities, the COVID-19 pandemic has made this situation even more dire, as hospitals have lost critical operating revenue due to pauses in elective surgeries that often keep them afloat. According to the Washington State Hospital Association, 13 rural hospitals had less than 45 days of cash on hand to maintain operations as of March, with five of those at risk of imminent closure.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ ["Millions Have Lost Health Insurance in Pandemic-Driven Recession." New York Times, 7/13/20](#)

⁵⁵ ["RURAL HOSPITAL SUSTAINABILITY: New Analysis Shows Worsening Situation for Rural Hospitals, Residents." Navigant, February 2019](#)

⁵⁶ [Letter to Gov. Jay Inslee, Washington State Hospital Association, 3/20/20](#)

We must do everything we can to reverse this tide and improve the health care services available to our rural residents, while keeping critical access hospitals afloat. I will always fight hard for federal funding for our rural hospitals and health care systems to ensure they remain sound.

Many such solutions are policies that would be implemented at the state level. While I would not have direct responsibility for such reforms from a seat in Congress, I will work closely with state officials to support productive policy changes and work to secure federal funding and approval for such measures where needed. This starts with protecting the Medicaid expansion under the Affordable Care Act, which has greatly strengthened the solvency of many rural hospitals.

I would be in favor of Washington exploring some of the policy reforms implemented by other states that have been effective in strengthening rural health care, both by improving outcomes for patient care and ensuring providers and hospitals can stay afloat financially. This could include adopting elements of Maryland’s innovative All Payer model, under which the state sets rates for hospital services that account for both the total cost of care and incentivized health outcomes, coupled with a global budgeting system that gives hospital more consistent revenue that they can plan for financially.⁵⁷ Or it could include lessons from Pennsylvania’s Rural Health Model, which has voluntarily transitioned select hospitals to a global payment system in which they are reimbursed through Medicare and other payers based on fixed budgets, with financial incentives available for increasing access to care and improving rural health outcomes.⁵⁸

We must be vigilant in continually studying and implementing the best policy advances deployed by states around the country that face similar challenges.

We also must continue to utilize and promote telemedicine, which for many health situations can greatly increase provider options for rural residents. The COVID-19 pandemic has seen a dramatic expansion of telemedicine services as providers have decreased contact between patients and health care workers when possible. While not applicable to all health care needs, this can be a critical element of our toolbox of extending care to rural areas, particularly for mental health treatment. We must closely study the best practices developed during this pandemic and continue this expansion of telemedicine in the future.

C. Boost public health funding and responsibly manage infectious disease programs to ensure we are prepared for future threats and to stop the next pandemic before it starts

The federal government’s response to our current crisis has been mismanaged from the beginning. Hamstrung by a decade-long lack of preparation for such an event, then held back by incompetent leadership, complicit members of Congress, and a refusal by some elected leaders to believe in public health science, we have let opportunity after opportunity to stem the tide of COVID-19 pass by. That can never happen again.

⁵⁷ [Maryland All-Payer Model, Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services](#)

⁵⁸ [“Saving Rural Hospitals: Will Changing Payment Methods Help?” University of Washington Center for Health Innovation & Policy Science, November 2019](#)

Ensure testing, treatment, and an eventual vaccine is covered free of charge

Our broken national health care system is riddled with inequities and inefficiencies that charge patients too much for care, as well as wildly differing amounts even for similar services. This reality is unacceptable and threatens the central value that health care is a human right; we must pass a public option that will extend quality and affordable care to every American who wants it so we can reign in drug companies and health insurers focused on massive profits and little else.

In the meantime, these inequities are even more dangerous when faced with a deadly pandemic, as high costs have prevented too many Americans from receiving the testing and care they need. This puts Americans’ health at risk, and greatly damages our ability to fight this virus by identifying cases, quarantining those ill to prevent further spread, and ensuring proper treatment for a full recovery. Those shortcomings put every single one of us in danger from increased viral spread, and delay our ability to reopen our economy safely and get back to work.

Yet disparities in costs for testing and treatment continue. In Texas, two individuals went to the same hospital to get tested for the coronavirus – one paying in cash and the other using insurance – and ended up with costs of \$199 and \$6,408, respectively.⁵⁹ Meanwhile, the drug maker Gilead which owns the medication Remdesivir which has been found effective to treat COVID-19 announced that it would charge up to \$3,000 per treatment course in the U.S. for patients to receive its drug.⁶⁰ This comes despite the fact that the drug is available through generic manufacturers in other countries for as little as \$600 a treatment course,⁶¹ and an independent study found that Gilead could recoup its costs for the development and production of Remdesivir – which was created partly with \$70 billion in public funds⁶² – by charging as little as \$10 a treatment course.⁶³

We can’t let drug company profits stand in the way of ensuring every American that needs it has access to the testing, treatment, and vaccine they need – particularly since billions of taxpayer dollars have already been invested toward the pursuit of such a vaccine.⁶⁴

In order to ensure we are able to defeat this pandemic as quickly as possible in order to save lives and get our country back to work, testing, treatment, and vaccines must be made available, free of charge.

Fully fund the CDC and its Prevention and Public Health Fund

We must start by fully funding the Center for Disease Control and Prevention to ensure the agency has the resources it needs to combat whatever public health threat it faces. And the agency must be staffed with competent professional leadership that will avoid the missteps that have plagued our current pandemic response.⁶⁵ In particular, we need to expand funding for the CDC’s Prevention and Public Health Fund (PPHF), which is a critical tool to strengthen and maintain our country’s public health infrastructure.

⁵⁹ [“Two Friends in Texas Were Tested for Coronavirus. One Bill Was \\$199. The Other? \\$6,408.” New York Times, 6/29/20](#)

⁶⁰ [“Remdesivir, the First Coronavirus Drug, Gets a Price Tag.” New York Times, 6/29/20](#)

⁶¹ [“Gilead prices coronavirus drug at \\$2,340 for rich countries.” Associated Press, 6/29/20](#)

⁶² [“Remdesivir, the First Coronavirus Drug, Gets a Price Tag.” New York Times, 6/29/20](#)

⁶³ [“ICER Presents Alternative Pricing Models for Remdesivir as a Treatment for COVID-19.” Institute for Clinical and Economic Review, 3/1/20](#)

⁶⁴ [“\\$1.2 Billion From U.S. to Drugmaker to Pursue Coronavirus Vaccine.” New York Times, 3/21/20](#)

⁶⁵ [“The CDC waited ‘it’s entire existence for this moment.’ What went wrong?” New York Times, 6/3/20](#)

The PPHF issues hundreds of millions of dollars in grants annually to state and local public health efforts, often comprising the main funding source for these programs.⁶⁶ Yet it has repeatedly seen its funding cut, leading the Trust for America's Health to estimate earlier this year that there was an annual shortfall of \$4.5 billion in "in the spending necessary to achieve comprehensive public health capabilities across the nation."⁶⁷ While many of these cuts shifted the funding to programs that were also important priorities, they represented a lack of foresight and leadership that took funding from a program that was vital, but had little political heft, instead of finding more responsible ways to fund those competing programs. In Congress, I won't take the easy way out and will fight to fully fund the PPHF and similar programs.

Rebuild the Strategic National Stockpile of key medical supplies, and produce those materials here at home

We also must avoid the mistakes of the past and invest in rebuilding our depleted Strategic National Stockpile after this crisis is over.

After the 2009 H1N1 crisis resulted in a large drawdown of materials in the stockpile, there was a recognized need to rebuild supplies. A report to the CDC in the wake of that crisis recommended preparing for future crises by obtaining equipment for the stockpile ahead of time, warning in 2010, "to the extent possible, the federal government should purchase material for the SNS in advance of an emergency. Large scale federal purchases in the midst of a public health emergency can severely limit the national supply chain for all purchasers."⁶⁸ The report urged greater funding, partly in service of this goal, counseling, "federal and state public health officials should work to ensure that public health preparedness is recognized as a key component of the nation's homeland security strategy, and is treated on par with federal and state funding for other national security response capabilities."⁶⁹

Those warnings were ignored, and we paid the price with deadly shortages of ventilators, masks, protective gear, and other key supplies. That can't happen again, and we must fully rebuild this stockpile so we're prepared the next time a crisis strikes.

We also can implement strong Buy America provisions in this effort to ensure that supplies are manufactured domestically, creating good jobs and boosting manufacturing capability here at home.

Expand our public health workforce

There is a proven playbook for emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic that numerous countries in Asia and Europe have followed to drastically reduce the coronavirus' spread. It starts with a robust public health workforce, particularly a nationwide army of contract tracers that can identify those exposed to COVID-19 before they unwittingly affect others and track down and defuse outbreaks before they explode. Strong contact tracing programs are the best way to tamp down this pandemic and safely reopen our economy until a vaccine is achieved and distributed.

⁶⁶ ["Report: Public health funding falls despite increasing threats." Modern Healthcare, 4/24/19](#)

⁶⁷ ["Ready or Not: 2020 PROTECTING THE PUBLIC'S HEALTH FROM DISEASES, DISASTERS, AND BIOTERRORISM." Trust for America's Health, January 2020](#)

⁶⁸ ["ASSESSING POLICY BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE PUBLIC HEALTH RESPONSE IN THE H1N1 INFLUENZA PANDEMIC." Association of State and Territorial Health Officials, June 2010](#)

⁶⁹ ["ASSESSING POLICY BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE PUBLIC HEALTH RESPONSE IN THE H1N1 INFLUENZA PANDEMIC." Association of State and Territorial Health Officials, June 2010](#)

The federal government has not done nearly enough to put this program in place, and we need to immediately hire tens of thousands of contract tracers who can work in communities across the country to stop coronavirus spread. This program can also create jobs to employ tens of thousands of out of work individuals, strengthening our economy at the same time. And when this pandemic is finally defeated, we need to retain the structural framework of these programs so we can quickly ramp up to face future threats and stop them before they get out of control.

We also must ensure a strong public health workforce in other areas, from supporting nursing programs that ensure an adequate supply of trained providers to public health professionals that can staff local public health departments nationwide. This pandemic has shown that the consequences of a depleted workforce are deadly for our communities and devastating to our economy. We can't let down our guard ever again.