

May 26, 2020

The Hon. Mitch McConnell (R-KY)
The Hon. Charles Schumer (D-NY)
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Hon. Nancy Pelosi (D-CA)
The Hon. Kevin McCarthy (R-CA)
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

RE: Coalition Urges Support for the CORE Act

Dear Members of the Senate and House:

We strongly urge that Congress strengthen the oversight and anti-corruption measures over the \$3 trillion and growing Coronavirus relief legislative programs.

Our organizations represent broad and diverse constituencies across the ideological spectrum concerned about the potential for fraud, waste and abuse of the nation's largest spending packages in history.

Congress recently passed three relief bills, with the last and most robust being the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, ("CARES Act"), which provide critical aid to citizens and businesses struggling to stay afloat in the wake of the Coronavirus pandemic. The CARES Act contains several notable oversight provisions designed to promote transparency of how these funds are being spent.

But these oversight measures have been slow to be implemented, if at all. Even with the limited transparency measures currently in place, many instances of self-dealing, fraud and waste have already become public record. The potential for further abuse is enormous, which demands further actions by Congress to protect taxpayer dollars and to ensure that the public understands whether relief funds are being spent as intended and for the good of the nation as a whole and to the needs of those most vulnerable.

Sens. Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.), Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) and Chris Coons (D-Del.), and Reps. John Sarbanes (D-Md.) and Pramila Jayapal (D-Wash.), have proposed oversight legislation that would do exactly that: the Coronavirus Oversight and Recovery Ethics Act ("CORE Act").

Without adding any significant new spending to the Coronavirus relief programs, the CORE Act would:

- **Rein in Conflicts of Interest.** The bill would impose conflict of interest standards on the hiring of contractors; restrict the revolving door between government officials, lobbyists and contractors; and enhance transparency of financial interests at stake.
- **Guarantee the Independence of Inspectors General.** The Inspectors General (IGs) are charged with monitoring compliance with the laws and ethics rules by government officials as well as recipients of the relief funds. The bill would mandate that IG vacancies be automatically filled without delay and that IGs could only be removed from office for cause. Further, the bill would require an immediate, independent, review of

ongoing OIG investigations in the event of a removal, providing a clear disincentive to remove an IG in retaliation for any particular investigation.

- **Strengthen the CARES Act Oversight Entities.** The CORE Act would grant the Congressional Oversight Commission subpoena authority and expand its scope to cover all relief spending. It would require all oversight entities to file regular public records and withhold the salaries of senior executives found not to be in compliance. The bill also would provide additional protections for whistleblowers.
- **Restrict Lobbying and Political Expenditures by Recipients of Relief Funds.** The bill would require an open book of all lobbying activity targeting relief funds and prohibit closed door meetings and private phone calls by lobbyists and government officials. It would also ban political expenditures by recipients of relief funds for one year after relief loans have been repaid.
- **Enhance Transparency.** The CORE Act would require all contractors and grantees of relief funds to file regular public reports on how the funds are being spent.

The CORE Act offers commonsense oversight and transparency measures solely dedicated to ensuring that our taxpayer dollars are being awarded to those in need and spent according to the intent of the law. These oversight measures would not significantly add to the cost of the Coronavirus relief program and, in fact, could save taxpayers billions of dollars in fraudulent and wasteful contracts and awards.

Experience has taught us that corruption and waste can diminish the impact and cost-effectiveness of emergency spending programs by the government. Experience has also taught us that oversight measures like those contained in the CORE Act can prevent that corruption and waste.

For these reasons we urgently call upon Congress to adopt the CORE Act either as a stand-alone bill or as an amendment to the next relief package, as expeditiously as possible.

Sincerely,

Accountable.US

African American Ministers in Action

American Family Voices

Americans for Financial Reform

Campaign for Accountability

Center for Biological Diversity

Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW)

Coalition to Preserve, Protect & Defend

Common Cause

Daily Kos

DemCast USA

Democracy Initiative

Democracy 21

Earthworks

Ambassador (ret.) Norman Eisen

White House Special Counsel for Ethics and Government Reform. 2009-11

End Citizens United/ Let America Vote Action Fund

Equal Justice Society

Financial Accountability and Corporate Transparency Coalition (FACT)

Fix Democracy First

Free Speech for People

Global Witness

Government Accountability Project

Government Information Watch

Greenpeace USA

Indivisible

International Corporate Accountability Roundtable (ICAR)

League of Women Voters of the United States

Livelihoods Knowledge Exchange Network (LiKEN)

Main Street Alliance

Mount Zion Community Outreach

MoveOn.org

National Association of Social Workers

NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice

New Mexicans for Money Out of Politics

Oil Change International

Open the Government

Oxfam America

Norman J. Ornstein

Richard W. Painter

Patriotic Millionaires

Peace Action

People for the American Way

Progressive Democrats of America

Project on Government Oversight (POGO)

Public Citizen

Publish What You Pay-US

Sierra Club

SMART Elections

Stand Up America

James A. Thurber

Union of Concerned Scientists

Voices for Progress

20/20 Vision

350 Humboldt