



April 27, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
United States House of Representatives
H-232, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
H-204, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
S-230, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
S-220, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Minority Leader McCarthy, Majority Leader McConnell, and Minority Leader Schumer:

The members of the Republican Study Committee's (RSC) Government Efficiency, Accountability & Reform (GEAR) Task Force write with regard to continued legislative efforts to address the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects. Our Task Force remains committed to offering solutions to create a more efficient American government that operates with accountability to citizens and allows American ingenuity to flourish.¹

These principles are especially important in this time of unprecedented crisis and the recovery period that will follow. We believe future legislation related to COVID-19 should contain policies which empower our federal workforce, optimize the utility of existing government facilities, and streamline federal rules to facilitate our nation's economic recovery. In light of those objectives, subsequent legislation considered by the House of Representatives in response to the COVID-19 pandemic should help advance these ideas:

1. Streamline Federal Hiring and Optimize Pay for High-Skilled Employees. The challenge of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic has brought out the best in many of America's federal personnel. These patriotic civil servants, along with countless experts in the private sector and generous volunteers, have done their best to respond to an extraordinary global crisis.

Still, the need for more highly trained and specialized workers to join the federal ranks has been made apparent. The CARES Act specifically waived the Title 5 federal hiring requirements for the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Chairman of the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) to allow for

¹ RSC GEAR Taskforce, Government Efficiency, Accountability, and Reform Taskforce, Power, Practices, Personnel: 100+ Commonsense Solutions to a Better Government, THE REPUBLICAN STUDY COMMITTEE (February 2020), https://rsc-johnson.house.gov/sites/republicanstudycommittee.house.gov/files/GEAR%20Report_Single%20Spread%20FINAL_0.pdf



streamlined hiring. This commonsense provision must be expanded. Thus, the Task Force recommends that federal managers across government be empowered to recruit and hire the most talented individuals who can fill these vital roles to ensure our workforce is better equipped for emergency response.² The Task Force also recommends reform of the General Schedule (GS) wage scale to allow for improved compensation for individuals with critical skills and the expanded use of meritorious bonuses to reward excellent performance by federal employees.³

2. Enact the Eliminate Agency Excess Space Act. Beyond unleashing the federal workforce, the government should optimize the utility of existing federal infrastructure to combat COVID-19. In particular, the Task Force recommends enactment of the Eliminate Agency Excess Space Act,⁴ sponsored by Rep. Greg Murphy (NC-03). This bill would eliminate antiquated laws that limit the sale, lease, or donation of federal office space. This simple reform would ease the transfer of unused federal buildings to support health care workers serving on the front lines of the COVID-19 crises.

3. Enact the Stopping Improper Payments to Deceased People Act. The CARES Act provides standard Economic Impact Payments of \$1,200 for many Americans. The Task Force urges that these funds be administered carefully to minimize the chance of fraud or waste that plagues other government programs. Particularly relevant is the fact that in 2015 the Social Security Administration Inspector General found 6.5 million deceased individuals who were still active recipients of Social Security benefits.⁵ Because current recipients of Social Security benefits will not be required to file an abbreviated tax form to receive the \$1,200 tax rebates,⁶ there is reason for concern that these payments will be made to deceased individuals. Thus, the Task Force recommends the enactment of H.R. 2543, Stopping Improper Payments to Deceased People Act, introduced by GEAR Chairman Rep. Greg Gianforte (MT-AL) and Rep. Cheri Bustos (IL-17).⁷ This legislation would grant all federal agencies the same access to the death data base and would require states to share their death data with the Social Security Administration. This would remove the gaps in data that lead to countless dollars being wasted on improper payments to deceased individuals.

4. Streamline the Permitting Process. While the federal government continues to focus on combatting the COVID-19 pandemic, it is also important it consider how to best facilitate a speedy economic recovery by streamlining government regulatory processes. We cannot allow government red tape to unnecessarily slow down job creation, project management, and private investment.

Specifically, the Task Force urges enactment of two important pieces of legislation: (1) the Critical Habitat Improvement Act,⁸ a bill that would require critical habitat designations be made only with land where the Secretary of the Department of Interior (DOI) has identified what elements are necessary for the survival of an endangered species, thus limiting burdensome restrictions on land use; and (2) the Federal Permitting and Jobs Act,⁹ a bipartisan bill that would streamline National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) by creating a two-year deadline for agencies to finalize permitting determinations and codifying Executive Order 13807, which allows for the executive Steering Council to help overcome any obstacles in an individual permitting process, if an agency or applicant seeks

² Id at 51.

³ Id at 58-60.

⁴ Eliminate Agency Excess Space Act, H.R. 6128, 116th Cong.

⁵ Office of Inspector General, Numberholders Age 112 or Older Who Did Not Have a Death, SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION (Mar. 2015) https://oig.ssa.gov/sites/default/files/audit/summary/pdf/Summary%2034030_0.pdf

⁶ <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm967>

⁷ Stopping Improper Payments to Deceased People Act of 2019, H.R. 2543, 116th Cong.

⁸ Critical Habitat Improvement Act of 2019, H.R. 5591, 116th Cong.

⁹ Federal Permitting Reform and Jobs Act of 2019, H.R. 3671, 116th Cong.



assistance. Both of these pro-growth pieces of legislation are critical to guiding our nation back to the historic production and prosperity it so recently enjoyed.

In so many cases, the existing burden of bureaucracy and overregulation has unnecessarily hindered the ability of the federal government to respond to this evolving crisis. Federal agencies have had to waive hundreds of rules and mandates that otherwise would have contributed to loss of life, economic uncertainty, and an exploding federal deficit.¹⁰ These latest examples have highlighted the need for significant regulatory reform in the future to better equip our nation to deal with emergencies. These reforms can have real life or death consequences, and time is of the essence.

Sincerely,


Rep. Mike Johnson (LA-04)
Chairman, Republican Study Committee
Rep. Greg Gianforte (MT-AL)
Chairman, RSC GEAR Task Force

CC:

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¹⁰ IMorales, List: 150 Regulations Waived to Help Fight COVID-19, AMERICANS FOR TAX REFORM (Apr. 4th, 2020), <https://www.ctr.org/rules?amp>

