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United States Senate  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1905

COMMITTEES:  
ARMED SERVICES  
BUDGET  
ENERGY AND  
NATURAL RESOURCES  
INTELLIGENCE  
RULES AND ADMINISTRATION

March 17, 2020

The Honorable Richard Shelby  
Chairman  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. Senate  
Room S-128, The Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. Senate  
Room S-128, The Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Shelby and Ranking Member Leahy:

As the nation responds to the novel coronavirus COVID-19 outbreak, I write to request the following items be included in any emergency response legislation.

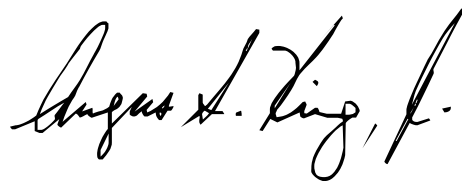
- I request that you fund the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Infectious Diseases Rapid Response Reserve Fund (IDRRRF) to a level of \$250 million, which is the level that bipartisan policy, medical, and national security experts at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) estimate is the minimum to support rapid response. At the beginning of the coronavirus crisis, the IDRRRF had \$135 million; thus, we need at least \$115 million to reach the \$250 million minimum level.
- The United States Agency for International Development Emergency Reserve Fund had only \$63 million available before the most recent supplemental. According to CSIS, we need significant investment—at least \$187 million—to get to the \$250 million in reserve funding that experts estimate is the minimum to support rapid response.
- As part of its response to the coronavirus pandemic, Congress should approve a provision similar to the bipartisan Good Samaritan Health Professionals Act (S. 1350/H.R. 6283) to provide federal Good Samaritan civil liability protection for health care volunteers during federally declared emergencies. The civil liability protection mirrors the protections provided by the federal Volunteer Protection Act and most state Good Samaritan volunteer protection laws. This legislation will close the gap in the existing Good Samaritan laws, and it will provide certainty to inter-state volunteers and the states and localities in need of these health care professionals. This will encourage volunteers and facilitate the rapid deployment of needed medical personnel nationwide in response to the coronavirus pandemic.

- Connecting patients to both primary and specialty healthcare is a particular challenge in rural areas. As social distancing practices are implemented, telehealth becomes even more critical for continuity of care and managing cases connected to COVID-19. I encourage the committee to include language to continue easing regulations that limit the ability for qualified health providers to delivery telehealth services to all patient populations, particularly Medicare beneficiaries. Recognizing the broadband and infrastructure shortfalls of rural America, I urge the Committee to include at least \$35 million for telehealth programs at the Health and Resources Services Administration (HRSA).
- One of my priorities is helping aging and disabled Americans remain safe and healthy in their homes. A critical program that supports these individuals and their families is the Meals on Wheels program funded through the Older Americans Act (OAA). During a time when this vulnerable population must protect themselves by avoiding public spaces, I request the Committee provide additional funding for the critical meal delivery programs through the OAA that, in addition to nutrition, also relieve social isolation.
- Coronavirus Economic Bonus Payments: I request that you provide funds for bonus checks to citizens, consistent with the plan that Senator Bennet has submitted to Leader Schumer and Sen. Wyden (attached). All Americans should receive an initial payment of \$2,000, subject to an income limitation of \$100,000 per individual and \$200,000 per couple. Thereafter, I request smaller quarterly bonus payments if economic conditions warrant further fiscal stimulus. Bonus payments will cease when unemployment drops to less than 0.5 percentage points above pre-virus levels. For Social Security, VA, and SSI beneficiaries, the checks would go out alongside their benefit check as soon as possible. For others, IRS would issue checks following a submittal of a 1040 for Tax Year 2019. I note that Congress could provide economic bonus payments through the tax code or through appropriations.
- To enable the continued operation of small businesses facing financial strain due to the coronavirus pandemic, I ask that you amend 11 U.S.C. § 1182(1) to increase the aggregate debt that a debtor may carry and still be considered a small business from \$2,000,000 adjusted for inflation under current law, to \$10,000,000. Doing so will enable many more small businesses facing liquidity challenges to utilize the simplified procedures that Congress recently enacted in the Small Business Reorganization Act. Small business owners will be able to continue their operations while spreading debt payments over a more manageable period of time.
- I also request that you fund the National Telecommunications and Information Administration with an additional \$500 million to develop and implement digital inclusion and telework programs for local and/or state governments to be used for one or more of the following purposes:

- To assist residents whose lack of broadband internet access, internet-enabled computing devices, and/or digital literacy puts them at educational, workforce, health, or economic risk due to COVID-19 public health measures, personal isolation, or home quarantine.
- To facilitate the rapid adoption of residential broadband internet service by these residents.
- To enable telework and telemedicine opportunities.
- To provide instructional and technical support services to facilitate these residents' effective internet use and digital literacy.
- To make available equipment, instrumentation, networking capability, hardware and software, or digital network technology for broadband services to these residents at low or no cost.
- Congress has taken steps to help displaced workers through previous economic downturns. One way to do this is by extending unemployment insurance (UI). That is why I request that the next legislative response to the COVID-19 outbreak include an extension to these important benefits.

I recognize that there is a wide variety of responses here, but we appear to be on the verge of extraordinary circumstances, and I believe we have the obligation to try as many preemptive solutions as possible for the wealth, health, and life of our nation and its people.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Angus S. King, Jr." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Angus S. King, Jr.