

specific carve out that acknowledges the unique challenges faced by our rural hospitals, like the many that serve Florida's second district. I was also disappointed that the bill does not provide statutory relief for those who may not have video phone capabilities required to meet reimbursement criteria for telehealth visits. It is my understanding and hope however, that the Center for Medicare and Medicaid services will be able to provide adequate guidance to allow for "audio only" visits.

I believe that the \$9.7 Billion provided to Secretary Sonny Perdue to aid our agriculture industry is a good first start, but ultimately more resources will need to be made available in the near future. Recent volatility in the global trade markets and natural disasters, combined with an already weakened Agriculture economy mean our producers need help now more than ever. It is my hope that we can provide additional relief to our farmers, ranchers, and foresters suffering from this crisis soon.

Finally, in an effort to protect the safety of this legislative body, this bill was largely negotiated by a few individuals within our leadership and the Administration. Their work, especially given the fact that they willingly put their own health at risk, is commendable. However, this came at the cost of a lack of input from the vast majority of our constituents and led to the inclusion of funding priorities that should have been debated over the course of the regular appropriations process. Programs like the National Endowment for the Arts, Corporation for Public Broadcasting, Institute of Museum and Library Services, and the Kennedy Center total hundreds of millions of dollars in this bill. We must ensure that any future relief package is entirely focused on the Coronavirus relief, and that vital resources are directed in the most effective way possible.

MIDDLE CLASS HEALTH BENEFITS TAX REPEAL ACT OF 2019

SPEECH OF

HON. BRADLEY BYRNE

OF ALABAMA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, March 27, 2020

Mr. BYRNE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak in support of the CARES Act. The situation on the ground demands action, which we must provide today.

Last week, 3.3 million Americans filed for unemployment. Small businesses around this country are shuttering. Millions of Americans and their children are at home practicing social distancing, a term that few knew 2 weeks ago. Countless others are on the front lines in our hospitals, doctors' offices, and pharmacies or simply checking us out at the grocery store. The American people need our help.

No region or section of the economy has been spared by this pandemic but South Alabama, which I represent, has been particularly hit hard. Millions of Americans come here every year to enjoy the weather, the beaches, and our southern way of life during the March and April Spring Break seasons. This all changed overnight. Countless small business owners have lost one of their busiest times of the year, and thousands of hard-working Alabamians have been let go from their job through no fault of their own.

The Constitution states that private property shall not be taken for public use without just

compensation. This principle guides my support of this bill today. In essence, the government has asked our nation's businesses and workers to shoulder the burden of economic shutdown, during good times, for the wellbeing of the country. For that reason, it is fair and just that we provide them a lifeline to help them weather this storm.

The situation is truly dire. Many small businesses are weeks or days away from depleting their cash reserves. When these small businesses close, rarely do they reopen. Thus, if we do not act, the economic devastation caused by extreme social distancing could plague communities for years.

Yesterday, I spoke to many small businesses in my district on a call. I was struck when one asked me to give them hope. To the American people who are watching, there is hope, and the help you need is on the way.

To small business owners, I say there is no more important provision in this bill than the Paycheck Protection Program. Through this program or nation's small businesses and 501(c)(3) nonprofits will be able to obtain a new 100 percent federally backed loan at an attractive interest rate. These loans will feature an automatic deferral for 6 months.

Most importantly, if the small business or non-profit uses their Paycheck Protection Program loan to cover their payroll, rent, mortgage interest, or utilities during an eight-week period, the loan will be forgiven. The only requirement for this forgiveness is for employers to maintain their payroll or hire their workers back. Thus, we have effectively said to these hurting small businesses, don't close your doors and keep your employees. And, if you do those things, which are necessary for us to exit the crisis quickly and effectively, we will give you a grant.

Congress specifically wrote this program to utilize the existing SBA 7(a) loan program. Unlike SBA disaster loans, these loans are generated by private banks, credit unions, and other lending institutions. We did this purposefully. We don't want bureaucrats at the SBA holding things up. We want the banks and credit unions you trust to get the money out to you as quickly as possible.

For our nation's workers who are struggling, we have provided enhanced unemployment benefits for those who have lost their job because of the coronavirus through no fault of their own. I strongly support this aid to help the millions who have been laid off and furloughed get through this difficult time.

Unfortunately, it is my fear that in our haste to help, we may have done real economic harm. Almost everyone supports enhanced unemployment benefits for those who have lost their job due to COVID-19, but by having a flat \$600 benefit for many workers on top of their normal state benefit, we will put some workers in a better position to not work than they would have been had they not been laid off due to the pandemic. This could lead to employers increasing layoffs and could cause employees to fail to seek to work once the crisis is abated. Not only is this a recipe for a government financed work disincentive, but the loss of these workers from the economy could strain our recovery. Basic economics should dictate to all of us that we should never make the cost of not working better than the cost of working. For that reason, I am deeply disappointed that the Democrats in the House and the Senate refused to provide for a simple fix to cure this issue.

I am also disappointed that other special interest and pork provisions crept into this bill at the last minute. The essential pieces of this legislation were ironed out almost a week ago, yet Democrats held up this important bill with a list of demands. Fortunately, most were rejected by negotiators from the Trump Administration but some were included in the bill.

At the request of House and Senate Democrats, a number of pet projects received pork funding in this legislation. The American people should know that Republicans fought these provisions. Yet, despite our best efforts to keep them out, funding for the Kennedy Center, Corporation for Public Broadcasting, Amtrak, and the Postal Service was included, among others. Additionally, at a time when employers are cutting back, new funds for Congressional staff and expenses were also added. This is disgraceful. Had the Speaker allowed an up or down vote on including these funds, they would have been stripped from the bill with bipartisan support. Yet, Washington as usual has resulted in their inclusion. The American people have a right to be angry about this pork. I hope there is bipartisan support to rescind it in the coming days.

The provision of the bill designed to help mid-sized companies also contains several lines that—while they may seem innocuous—are special interest gifts to big labor. Specifically, the bill requires that employers maintain existing collective bargaining agreements already in place and requires neutrality in any attempt to unionize. Changing times call for changing agreements between management and labor. By locking existing collective bargaining agreements in place, we put the thumb on the scale of labor to the detriment of the health of the business. More fundamentally, "neutrality" in organizing means allowing the union to talk to a business's employees without the employer being able to present the other side of what unionization could mean to the employer. This is fundamentally unfair to employers and employees.

These provisions will undoubtedly make certain industries and certain companies less likely to apply for the assistance they need to maintain their workforce. It will also provide an unfair advantage to companies already unionized over those who are not and to areas of the country that have a heavy union presence. Union membership is declining nationwide. We don't need a union bailout in a bill to help with the coronavirus recovery.

Finally, I note the enormous price tag of this bill. We should all pause to think about over \$2 trillion—the largest appropriations bill in the history of the Congress—being rung up on our nation's credit card with little warning. I do not question the need for such a major economic rescue package but we cannot continue to borrow in good times with the idea that we will simply borrow even more in the bad. America must have a serious conversation about how much government we are willing to pay for. This crisis should show us that the international order for things that we have depended on for decades is not more than a crisis away from a collapse. Today it is a medical supply collapse. Tomorrow it may be our debt. No party is without blame for our debt situation. Many things must change in the aftermath of this crisis, and we must ensure that our lack of fiscal responsibility is one of them.

Mr. Speaker, the bottom line is there are many things in this bill I do not like. There are

portions that I think are a mistake. But, Mr. Speaker, this is our time for action. The good in here outweighs the bad. Do not hold this bill up. We owe it to the citizens of this great country who are struggling. We owe action for them today.

HONORING THE LIFE OF FRED STARR

HON. TED BUDD

OF NORTH CAROLINA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, April 7, 2020

Mr. BUDD. Madam Speaker, I rise today to honor the life of Fred Starr of Greensboro, North Carolina.

Fred was born on December 11, 1932 in Springfield, Massachusetts. He graduated from Trinity College in 1955 and went on to serve his country in the U.S. Army for two years. After more than a decade in sales and management positions, Fred eventually found his way to Thomasville Furniture Industries. He started there in 1974 and rose up the ranks to become President and CEO by 1982. He oversaw Thomasville Furniture Industries until 1998.

Outside of being active in the furniture world, Fred was deeply involved with many different organizations in our community. Some of the positions he held included President of the Piedmont Triad Partnership, Vice Chairman of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, board member of High Point University, board President of the Eastern Music Festival, and chairman of the North Carolina Shakespeare Festival.

When thinking of the giants in the North Carolina furniture industry, Fred Starr is certainly at the top of the list. He had a significant impact on his community and on the state of North Carolina. His contributions will live on for years to come.

Please join me in gratitude for Fred's life and in praying for Sue, his wife of 62 years, and for the entire Starr family.

INTRODUCTION OF THE IMPROVING ACCESS TO JOBS ACT

HON. JESÚS G. "CHUY" GARCÍA

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, April 7, 2020

Mr. GARCÍA of Illinois. Madam Speaker, I rise to introduce the Improving Access to Jobs Act along with my colleagues Congresswoman AYANNA PRESSLEY and Congressman MARK TAKANO.

Americans are stuck in congestion, on crumbling roadways and transit systems, and are too often forced to travel further and further for jobs because our system fails to provide safe and convenient choices other than a car trip.

The Improving Access to Jobs Act requires that 'safe and convenient access to employment' is an added condition for States' minimum standards for public roads—for both new construction and roadway improvement projects.

States and metropolitan planning organizations will assess how the transportation system connects people to jobs by auto, transit, bike, and pedestrian investments, and ensures new investments do not degrade transit, bike, and pedestrian access.

The Improving Access to Jobs Act will also adjust the definition of access to incorporate a measurement of travel times, travel stress for active travel (bike and pedestrian), and cost for low-income travelers.

I am glad that the Improving Access to Jobs Act is endorsed by Transportation for America (T4A), Sierra Club, National Resources Defense Council (NRDC), National Association of

City Transportation Officials (NACTO), Environmental Law and Policy Center (ELPC), Rails-to-Trails Conservancy.

The Improving Access to Jobs Act will reconnect our communities, enabling people to take shorter, more convenient trips, reducing congestion and emissions, and improving access to jobs for all.

I urge this body to swiftly pass this legislation.

THANK YOU TO WASHINGTON STATE'S FIRST RESPONDERS

HON. RICK LARSEN

OF WASHINGTON

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, April 7, 2020

Mr. LARSEN of Washington. Madam Speaker, I rise today to thank the 3,360 emergency medical technicians and paramedics, 7,190 firefighters, and 9,670 police and sheriffs patrol officers who are on the front lines in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic in Washington state.

While most workers are under stay at home orders, these Washingtonians go out into the field, risking exposure to a contagious and deadly virus in order to protect the public.

The lack of personal protective equipment for public safety offers is unacceptable. I have spoken with first responders from my district who have contracted COVID-19 or been forced to self-isolate because of potential exposure.

Madam Speaker, I rise to express my gratitude for first responders and call on Congress to ensure firefighters, police officers, EMTs and paramedics have the personal protective equipment they need to do their dangerous jobs safely during the ongoing pandemic.