

April 10, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20514

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader of the U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20514

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader of the U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

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

Our nation is at a crossroads. The COVID-19 pandemic presents extraordinary challenges as state and local officials administer the remaining primaries and the general election. While the states administer elections, Congress has the obligation to support those elections, so that they are safe, fair, and secure. Elections are the very foundation upon which our democratic republic is built.

Our response to this pandemic can reunite us and reaffirm our commitment to the Great American Experiment. That is why we -- a cross-partisan coalition of business, civic, political, and thought leaders dedicated to strengthening American democracy and putting voters first -- are coming together to protect the integrity of our elections and ensure U.S. citizens have a safe way to express their voices in the political process.

Since COVID-19 is highly contagious and social distancing measures have been adopted, it is inevitable that more Americans than ever before will seek to vote early or by absentee ballot. This will put a strain on the varied election systems in our country. Tailored, viable, cross-partisan solutions to uphold our elections exist.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends elections officials, where allowed in the jurisdiction, encourage mail-in methods of voting, early voting, drive-up voting; off-peak voting, relocating polling places from nursing homes, long-term care facilities, and senior living residences, and consider additional social distancing measures. In order for the CDC recommendations to be implemented effectively, state and local officials will need additional funding.

We strongly recommend increasing election funding to implement the CDC recommendations, improve cybersecurity, reduce the Election Assistance Commission (EAC) matching levels and red tape for EAC applications, and cover postage fees for elections-related materials and ballots. Waiting until the fall to reassess the status of the virus will make it too late to inform voters of their options and equip election administrators with the tools they need to run secure elections. We urge you to consider and include the following provisions in the next stimulus bills.

1. Immediately reduce the Election Assistance Commission (EAC) matching requirement and red tape for EAC applications

States are currently required to match 20% of Help America Vote Act (HAVA) funds provided by the EAC, which imposes a burden and constraint on states with fewer financial resources. Congress should remove altogether or reduce the EAC matching requirement to 5% as

it has been with past funding, so states can access much-needed resources in a timely manner to safely and properly carry out their elections. Congress should also encourage the EAC to cut red tape that can stymie the release and use of these funds.

2. Provide significantly more for election funding for polling station safety, additional early voting, mail-in voting, election information, rescheduling, postage and cybersecurity

State election officials on both sides of the aisle recognize significantly more additional federal funds are needed to fully and successfully implement safe, fair and secure elections. This is in addition to the phase three stimulus bill allocation of \$400 million to states. The additional funds could be used by states to improve voter and poll worker safety, increase early voting times, improve their ability to process a sharp increase in absentee voting requests, mail ballots to all voters who request one, provide additional election information for voters, and meet unanticipated costs from having to adjust timing and polling station venues as a result of the pandemic.

Congress must work with the U.S. Postal Service to cover postage costs for official election-related materials and ballots, so no U.S. citizen is excluded from the political process simply because they cannot afford to pay to cast their ballot by mail. This is consistent with the current practice of paying for absentee ballot postage for members of the military. We must guarantee that all Americans have the full ability and opportunity to make their voices heard, regardless of socioeconomic disparities.

Also, given this increased reliance on vote by mail and threat of interference in our elections by foreign adversaries, it is imperative that we fund additional physical and cybersecurity efforts.

COVID-19 knows no political parties or ideological boundaries, so now is the time to come together and act to protect the American people, our elections, and our democratic republic. We have already seen states postpone primary elections while other states scramble to make last minute adjustments to their elections leading to standoffs between governors, state legislatures, and the courts. The sooner states can get the funding they need, the sooner they can begin to implement the necessary changes to our elections this year.

We ask for your support in incorporating the provisions outlined above into the phase four stimulus bill to ensure safe, fair, and secure elections that are truly representative of the people's will.

Sincerely,

Jeff Clements, CEO, American Promise

Nick Penniman, Founder and CEO, Issue One

Nilmini Rubin, Co-Founder and Managing Director, Fix the System

Daniella Ballou-Aares, CEO and Co-Founder, Leadership Now Project

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Evan McMullin, Executive Director, Stand Up Republic

Nick Troiano, Executive Director, Unite America

