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SELECT SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE CORONAVIRUS CRISIS

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Chairman James E. Clyburn
Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis
Briefing on “Supporting America’s Cities: What Mayors Need to Safely Reopen”
May 29, 2020

I want to begin by thanking our distinguished panelists and esteemed Members for joining us today. This week, our country passed a grim milestone: more than 100,000 Americans have lost their lives due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Thousands of Americans continue to contract this virus every day; over 150 more here in South Carolina on Yesterday. And the day before, Wednesday, marked our largest single-day increase of COVID-19 deaths.

Local community leaders across the country, Democrats and Republicans, need strong federal leadership to help them combat this deadly threat. Communities need federal help to get the protective equipment and testing supplies they need to protect their front-line medical workers and essential employees.

Unfortunately, the Administration is leaving it up to the states forcing them to compete against each other in order to purchase equipment and supplies from the private sector; leading to higher prices and greater shortages. We need the federal government to use its existing authorities to efficiently, effectively and equitably get resources to the states and cities that need them most.

This Committee has heard from bipartisan public health experts that cities and states need a comprehensive, nationwide plan to safely reopen the economy, including detailed plans for testing, contact tracing, and containment. Instead, states have been forced to develop their own testing plans, leading to inefficient, ineffective and unequitable patchworks that will only prolong and exacerbate this crisis.

Local governments are also facing financial crises. A recent survey shows that 9 in 10 cities expect budget shortfalls due to the coronavirus outbreak, and many will be forced to lay off employees and cut critical services, including first responders and the emergency services they provide.

These cities need emergency federal relief now to prevent a collapse of their economies and public functions. To prevent these harmful outcomes, the House passed the HEROES Act, which provides hundreds of billions of dollars in relief to small and mid-sized communities. I encourage the Senate to send that bill to the President’s desk for his signature without further delay.

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A plethora of local leaders across the country have shown real leadership during this pandemic. Some of them are here with us today; mayors who are guiding their cities through this public health crisis with resolve and integrity.

Big-City Mayor, Eric Garcetti of Los Angeles, who was one of the first mayors in the country to close non-essential businesses and issue a mandatory “Safer at Home” emergency order, potentially saving thousands of lives. Small-Town Mayor Mary Jane Scott of Mangum, Oklahoma, who has led her city through a virus outbreak that spread through a local nursing home with tragic consequences.

These and the other local leaders who are with us today are on the front lines of the coronavirus pandemic. They have the difficult, challenging job of protecting the health of their residents while also trying to safely reopen their economies and keep their city services running.

The goal of today’s briefing is to find out how they think the federal government can provide the resources they need to protect their citizens and the guidance they need to sustain critical services and reopen economic activity.

This is not about casting blame—it is about repairing faults, protecting communities and saving lives. I hope we can listen to and learn from these local leaders in an open and bipartisan way.

I now recognize, Ranking Member Scalise, for his opening remarks.