

Opening Statement of Chairman Robert C. “Bobby” Scott (VA-03)

House Committee on Education and Labor Full Committee Markup

FY21 Budget Reconciliation Bill – Committee Print

WebEx

Tuesday, February 9, 2020 | 3:00 p.m.

Last week, the House passed a budget resolution for Fiscal Year 2021, which instructed 12 House Committees to write a proposal that would provide \$1.9 trillion in relief to Americans across the country. This process—called budget reconciliation—is an important tool that will allow Congress to avoid partisan gridlock and act with the urgency that this moment requires.

More than one year after the first case of COVID-19 was confirmed in the United States, the need to help our constituents overcome this pandemic has only grown.

Over 460,000 people in this country have died from the virus; millions of workers remain unemployed and the latest research predicts that 7 million of the jobs lost will not come back; students across the country are falling further behind; and an unprecedented number of children and families are facing hunger and homelessness.

Today, we are marking up the Education and Labor Committee’s piece of the budget reconciliation bill, which will provide our communities with the immediate relief they deserve.

This legislation ensures K-12 schools will have the resources to bring students and educators back into classrooms safely. It invests \$130 billion to help schools comply with CDC guidelines for safely reopening schools, including repairing ventilation systems, reducing class sizes so that students can be spread out and implementing social distancing guidelines, purchasing personal protective equipment, and hiring staff to care for students’ health and well-being. School districts will also be required to set aside 20 percent of the funding they receive to address lost time in the classroom.

In response to the severe financial strain that COVID-19 has placed on institutions of higher education, the bill also provides nearly \$40 billion to support colleges and universities, half of which has to go towards emergency financial aid for students.

This bill also dedicates \$40 billion for early childhood care and education programs to keep child care providers open and help struggling families afford care. We cannot fully reopen the economy if our child care system collapses.

One of the most tragic consequences of this pandemic has been the surge in childhood hunger. An estimated 17 million children did not have enough to eat last year. The proposal extends vital food assistance through the Pandemic-EBT program and boosts the value of WIC benefits for vulnerable mothers and children.

The bill also makes targeted investments to protect the health and well-being of our communities. This includes increased funding for programs that prevent and respond to child abuse and neglect, hundreds of millions of dollars to support survivors of domestic violence or sexual assault, and more than \$4 billion to help families cover the costs of home heating and cooling.

This bill also provides meaningful relief to workers and their families by protecting access to affordable health care during the pandemic. Specifically, it subsidizes COBRA premiums for workers who have been laid-off or subject to reduced hours.

This rescue plan also gives the Department of Labor new funding to establish and enforce workplace safety standards that protect workers from COVID-19.

And critically, this rescue package gradually raises the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour by 2025. This will lift nearly 1 million people out of poverty and put money into the pockets of 27 million workers, who will accelerate our economic recovery by spending that money in local businesses. According to the CBO, a \$15 minimum wage, even after you account for any employment losses, will put an additional net \$333 billion into the pockets of low- and middle-income workers, outweighing the cost to the federal government.

My Republican colleagues may object to the process by which we are securing these urgent provisions. Ideally, we would have more time to review this relief package.

However, we must address the urgent needs of the people now. The multiple crises affecting our communities will grow worse every day if we do not act. We must recognize that we cannot afford to prioritize process over the urgent needs of people across this country.

We must also remember that using the reconciliation process to pass major legislation is nothing new.

While in the Majority, Republican Members used that procedure to undermine the *Affordable Care Act* and pass an unpaid \$1.9 trillion tax cut with 80 percent of the benefits going to the top 1 percent and corporations. If our colleagues can use the budget reconciliation process to restrict access to affordable health care for millions of people and give tax cuts to the wealthy and corporations, then—surely—we can use it to secure relief for our students, workers, and communities, which they so urgently need.

Our country is at a pivotal moment in the fight against COVID-19. We have the responsibility to do everything in our power to defeat this pandemic. This legislation takes a critical step to fulfill that basic responsibility by providing our communities with the relief to get through this pandemic and build back a better America.