

March 20, 2020

Re: GOP CARE Act fails crucial justice standards

Dear Senator:

On behalf of our millions of members and activists nationwide, we write to you with deep concerns about the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act released by Leader McConnell. This legislation is a monumental failure of conscience and leadership during a moment of national crisis. As organizations and communities committed to social, economic, and environmental justice, we urge you to improve it immediately.

Everyday people need urgent and immediate action from Congress to save lives. Unfortunately, the McConnell bill establishes a cruel system of means-testing that would penalize the most vulnerable. Instead of providing immediate relief to people who cannot work to ensure they can buy food, water, and medications, pay rent, and easily access virus testing and subsequent healthcare, the legislation limits direct payments for those who need it most. This is unacceptable.

The current proposal clearly supports profits over people and corporations over workers. In this life or death moment, it is astounding to see Senate Republicans prioritizing corporate bailouts in the form of tax cuts and loans over direct aid to people. There is no reason to believe that these benefits will trickle down to benefit workers and communities in urgent need.

The worst mistakes of 2008 are on the verge of being repeated. The current \$208 billion in lending amounts to a condition-free blank check to massive corporations. Without protections for workers and the environment, and without explicit limits on stock buybacks, the current proposal is just another bailout with no strings attached.

As Congress works to allocate aid, the fossil fuel and other extractive industries continue maneuvering to exploit this crisis. It is staggering that one of the Trump Administration's first moves was to support Big Oil by announcing plans to fill the Strategic Petroleum Reserve with potentially \$20 billion in taxpayer funds.¹ The coal industry has been similarly shameless in requesting a wish list that includes tax breaks, royalty relief, access to credit and regulatory rollbacks.² At this grave moment, the workers and communities rendered into sacrifice zones by these industries need to be rescued, not the corporations who will continue a business as usual scenario that exacerbates intersecting crises that existed long before COVID-19.

There is a danger that the \$150 billion in loans and loans guarantees could disproportionately benefit the fossil fuel industry. To center communities, especially environmental justice and Indigenous communities, and protect the climate from this risk, we ask that polluters be explicitly excluded from the definition of "eligible businesses" in the current bill.

¹ "Mnuchin Calls for U.S. to Buy as Much as \$20 Billion in Oil." <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-03-19/mnuchin-calls-for-u-s-to-buy-as-much-as-20-billion-in-oil>

² "U.S. coal mining industry seeks wide-ranging coronavirus bailout: letter." <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-coal/u-s-coal-mining-industry-seeks-wide-ranging-coronavirus-bailout-letter-idUSKBN21701F>

Instead of support for corporate executives, we need support for fossil fuel and all workers. We can better protect oil and coal workers through funding that supports workforce rights and builds a just, collaborative, and deliberative transition to a sustainable economy, including by guaranteeing funding for health benefits, pensions, wages, paid sick leave for fossil fuel workers as well as community tax base replacement assistance for critical public services.

Congressional action must be focused both on the immediate needs of workers and communities, as well as laying the groundwork for a more sustainable future. We cannot afford to repeat past mistakes and must instead build a sustainable economy that will allow workers and communities to live a life of dignity and security well into the future.

Sincerely,

Center for Biological Diversity

Center for Sustainable Economy

Dēmos

Detroiters Working for Environmental Justice

Endangered Species Coalition

Friends of the Earth

GreenLatinos

Greenpeace USA

Kentuckians For The Commonwealth

Oil Change U.S.

Progressive Democrats of America

Sustainable Energy & Economy Network

Women's Earth and Climate Action Network (WECAN)