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CONGRESSWOMAN SHEILA JACKSON LEE (TX-18)

COMMITTEE ON THE BUDGET

**VIRTUAL MEMBER DAY HEARING ON
BUDGET PRIORITIES FOR FY 2022**

**TUESDAY, MARCH 23, 2021
CISCO WEBEX
10:30 A.M.**



- Thank you, Chairman Yarmuth and Ranking Member Smith for convening this Members Day hearing for Members to share their budgetary priorities for fiscal year 2022.
- As a member who is honored to serve on this important committee, before I share my priorities for the upcoming fiscal year, I want to do something we do not do often enough, and that is to say thank you for the great work the Budget Committee has already done.
- Mr. Chairman, when you assumed the gavel for the 117th Congress, America was in the grip of the lethal COVID-19 pandemic, which has now claimed the lives of more than a half-million of our fellow Americans: fathers and mothers, grandparents, siblings, friends, neighbors, loved ones, health care workers and first responders.

- The pandemic left our nation's economy in shambles; millions were left jobless and food insecure, schools were closed, small businesses shuttered, and vaccine distribution was another disaster.
- Bold action needed was needed and it was needed now.
- Into the breach stepped this Committee majority, this Democratic congressional majority, and the incoming Democratic Administration led by President Biden, who promised the American people that the days of chaos, confusion, and blame were over and that help would be on the way.
- And we delivered big-time, with a response that was transformative and commensurate to the challenges facing our country.
- With tens of millions of Americans infected, more than half a million lives lost, over 18 million Americans unemployed and millions more hungry and food and housing insecure, I am happy to announce that thanks to the work of my colleagues, congressional Democrats in the House and Senate and the Biden Administration, at long last the people of Texas can now take comfort in the fact that 'Help Is On The Way.'
- In straightforward simple terms, this life-saving legislation puts vaccines in arms, puts money in people's pockets, puts children safely back in school, and it will put workers back in jobs.
- The plan will mount a national vaccination program that includes setting up community vaccination sites nationwide and addressing disparities facing communities of color and takes complementary measures to combat the virus, including scaling up testing and tracing, addressing shortages of personal protective equipment and other critical supplies, investing in high-quality treatments and addressing health care disparities.
- The plan finishes the job on the President's promise to provide \$2,000 in direct assistance to households across America with

checks of \$1,400 per person, following the \$600 down payment enacted in December.

- The plan will also provide direct housing assistance, nutrition assistance for 40 million Americans, expand access to safe and reliable child care and affordable health care, extend unemployment insurance so that 18 million American workers can pay their bills and support 27 million children with an expanded Child Tax Credit and more than 17 million low-wage workers through an improved Earned Income Tax Credit.
- The plan delivers \$170 billion for education and \$45 billion for childcare providers. This includes a \$130 billion investment in K-12 school re-opening and making up for lost time in the classroom.
- Here is what the American Rescue Plan means for the State of Texas, Houston, and Harris County.
- An estimated \$16.7 billion will come to the State of Texas.
- The lion's share of \$3.3 billion will come directly to the City of Houston, and Harris County will receive a similar share of \$5.667 billion, thanks to a provision in the law that you worked with me to secure that created the Coronavirus Local Fiscal Recovery Fund and appropriated \$45.57 billion.
- \$1.4 billion in direct payments is allocated to smaller jurisdiction like Jacinto City.
- Houston Independent School District can expect to receive close to \$100 million (\$993,198 million to be more precise).
- The law specifically allows this funding to be used:
 1. To respond to the pandemic or its negative economic impacts, including assistance to households, small businesses, and nonprofits, or aid to impacted industries such as tourism, travel, and hospitality;

2. For premium pay to eligible workers performing essential work (as determined by each recipient government) during the pandemic, providing up to \$13 per hour above regular wages;
 3. For the provision of government services to the extent of the reduction in revenue due to the pandemic (relative to revenues collected in the most recent full fiscal year); and
 4. To make necessary investments in water, sewer, or broadband infrastructure.
- In addition to these funds, Texas will receive \$100 million out of the newly created \$10 billion Coronavirus Capital Projects Fund for “critical capital projects directly enabling work, education, and health monitoring, including remote options, in response to the public health emergency with respect to the Coronavirus Disease.
 - Mr. Chairman, what the American Rescue Plan means for a hard-working and hard-pressed single mother of two children making a modest income is this:

Stimulus checks: $\$1,400 \times 3 = \$4,200$

Child tax credit: $\$3,600$ (5-year-old) + $\$3,000$ (9-year-old) = $\$6,600$. Half of that amount will be paid out periodically from late July through December; the rest will come as a check with next year’s taxes.

Enhanced unemployment: If the parent becomes unemployed in March, she will be eligible for $\$300$ in aid every week through the last week of August.

Total: $\$10,800$ from stimulus and tax credits, plus another $\$7,500$ from 25-weeks of enhanced unemployment aid. This individual would also receive $\$318$ per week in state

unemployment aid and thousands more from the Earned Income Tax Credit.

- Finally, Mr. Chairman, this transformative legislation will also provide direct housing assistance, nutrition assistance for 40 million Americans, expand access to safe and reliable child care and affordable health care, extend unemployment insurance so that 18 million American workers can pay their bills and support 27 million children with an expanded Child Tax Credit and more than 17 million low-wage childless workers through an improved Earned Income Tax Credit, which will reduce the number of children living in poverty in America by 50 percent.
- Mr. Chairman, I recite this litany not to be boastful but to indicate to our viewers what can be done through the effective use of fiscal policy by an active, engaged government motivated by science, data, knowledge, and above, concern for the well-being of the American people.
- Daily, more than 2 million vaccine doses are being administered and today, thanks to the American Rescue Plan, the Center for Disease Control reports that more than 33 million people, have received either both doses of the Pfizer and BioNTech or Moderna vaccines or a single dose of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine and about 64 million people have received at least one dose of a vaccine.
- This means that more than 10 percent of the national population has been vaccinated and more people have been vaccinated than the 29 million documented cases of the coronavirus in the country.
- U.S., more people have now been fully vaccinated than have been reportedly infected with the virus.
- Mr. Chairman, I believe that in the years to come, we will look back on passage of the American Rescue Plan as the moment when Americans of all beliefs and colors and creeds had their faith renewed in the capacity of government to rise to the occasion and meet the challenges affecting their lives and livelihoods.

- But there is so much more work to be done and today I wish to touch on briefly four areas that fiscal policy can play a critical role in enhancing the security of our citizens and positioning our country to compete and win in the global economy of the 21st century: income and retirement security, infrastructure, criminal justice reform, and reparative justice.

INCOME AND RETIREMENT SECURITY

- By 2035, Americans aged 65 years and older will outnumber children under the age of 18 for the first time in U.S. history and ensuring that current and future generations of seniors are able to enjoy a financially secure retirement is one of our greatest policy challenges.
- Social Security is the foundation of American retirement security and plays an increasingly crucial role in seniors' economic security and single-handedly keeps millions of seniors out of poverty each year.
- Women and minorities are especially at risk of retirement insecurity because they accumulated lower lifetime earnings, wealth, and rates of pension coverage due to discrimination and sexism.
- Keeping our promise to current and future retirees will require more revenue and as our population ages, the federal budget will need to support more seniors over longer periods of time, requiring more federal spending in the years ahead.

INFRASTRUCTURE

- When it comes to creating jobs, there is no more effective means than investing in infrastructure.
- It has been demonstrated time and again that for every dollar invested in infrastructure, at least \$1.63 is economic activity is generated.

- A recent example of effective investment in infrastructure is the Obama-Biden Recovery Act of 2009, which created nearly one million jobs over the first year of investment while at the same time improving the lives of virtually every American who can enjoy the roads, bridges, and transit systems that were built or improved through this funding.
- I come from the district that embodies the nation's transportation needs, with the large Port of Houston, the gigantic and busy George Bush International Airport, major freight rail lines, and major interstate highways, so I understand how sound transportation and infrastructure investments will make our nation globally competitive and enhance the quality of life in our communities.
- The President's budget requests a 2% increase in infrastructure funding. This amount is too paltry to permit us to do anything but tread water when we need to be heavily investing in our nation's infrastructure and moving forward.
- Congress must act boldly and decisively in the area of transportation to ensure that the necessary investments are made and equitably distributed, not just to bi-coastal areas, but to all areas, including funding light rail in the rapidly growing Houston metroplex.
- And it must allocate its fiscal resources in such a way that all communities are treated equitable as Title VI of the Civil Rights Act requires and we can say goodbye to a bygone era when agencies the Texas Department of Transportation ignored its responsibilities under the law and its obligations to low-income and marginalized communities like Independence Heights on major infrastructure projects like the I-40 North Houston Improvement Project.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM AND REPARATIVE JUSTICE

- Finally, Mr. Chairman, I would urge the Budget Committee to undertake two important research projects.
- I recall as a newly elected Member of Congress, then President Bill Clinton reminding the nation that "we don't have a person to

waste,” and that “putting people first” is and would always be the lodestar of his administration, an administration that went on to compile an economic record of 22 million new jobs that has never been matched.

- I agree that we do not have a person to waste and that is why I am urging this committee to study and report on the impact that biases and inequalities in the nation’s criminal justice system hold back the economy from realizing its full potential.
- Second, as the author and principal sponsor of H.R. 40, which establishes a commission to study the effects of slavery on modern-day America and to recommend proposals to eliminate remaining badges and vestiges of oppression, I believe it would be a valuable service to the nation for this Committee to study the impact of racial discrimination and racial inequalities on the fiscal and economic health of the nation.
- On March 4, 1865, in his incomparable Second Inaugural Address, President Lincoln spoke of the harm to the nation resulting “from the bondman’s 250 years of unrequited toil.”
- It is therefore appropriate that 156 years later, we examine, acknowledge, and make recompense for what is now over 400 years of disadvantage and inequality saddled upon African Americans.
- Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for this opportunity to share these views with the Budget Committee.