

**Committee on Oversight and Reform
Subcommittee on Government Operations**

“Frontline Feds: Serving the Public During a Pandemic”

**Testimony of Sen. Jim DeMint
Chairman, Conservative Partnership Institute
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Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the invitation to appear before the Committee today, and for calling this hearing.

As we all know, reopening the American economy is a question of *when*, not *if*. So is the question of reopening the federal government. And these are questions crying out to be answered, now. For as well as federal agencies, courts, and Congress itself have done in recent months conducting the nation’s business remotely, this is not a sustainable model for a multi-trillion, democratically accountable government.

We have to get federal employees back to work – safely, prudently, creatively, but as soon as possible. Yes, because we need the government up and running. Yes, because these workers and their families need a return to normalcy.

But also because of the profound and overdue signal it would send to the rest of the nation: that it is time to fight back. Over the winter, the COVID-19 virus threw America back on its heels. But just as the health care system is now ready with treatments and strategies to fight the health risks of the virus, so too is our economy now poised to answer the economic damage it has done.

The COVID shutdowns were the greatest manmade economic catastrophe in history. Whatever people’s opinion about their prudence or effectiveness, the fact is that halting our economy, dead in its tracks, for three months has been devastating to our nation.

Millions of Americans have lost their jobs. Businesses have been hurt, or closed altogether. One report, from scholars at the University of California Santa Cruz, estimates that 22 percent of all small businesses that were open in February were closed, permanently, by April.

That includes 25 percent of all women-owned businesses, 32 percent of Latino-owned businesses, and an unimaginable 41 percent of businesses owned by black men or women. This is not a business-cycle correction; it’s an economic neutron bomb that an entire generation of entrepreneurs will need a decade or more to recover from.

That recovery has already begun, as shown by the surprisingly hopeful jobs report earlier this month. But the economy still needs all the help it can get – including reopening the federal government.

Doing so will not only get thousands of government offices back open doing the people's business.

It would also kick-start the languishing federal contracting industry. As you know, contracting businesses provide goods and services to our government agencies. They provide millions of jobs for workers in every field, at every skill and income level, in every state in the union.

Finally, it would show the rest of the economy that America *is* back open for business, and also *how* it can be. Rather than waiting and following the private sector, the government can lead by example, by doing reopening "right." We can be creative with workplace distancing or rotating schedules. We should urge older employees and those with health risks to continue to work from home. But we should welcome everyone else back.

State and local governments would in all likelihood follow suit. And even if they did not, frankly, federal offices should open even, if necessary, in defiance of local shutdowns. The purpose of the shutdowns was not to hunker and hide until COVID was cured. It was to give our health care system and our economy time to adjust. And we have. Hand sanitizer and facemasks – in short supply four months ago – are now in every store.

The infrastructure of distance working and learning is up and running for those who need it. Our health care providers, from surgeons to ER nurses, and even to our mental health providers, have pivoted and are ready to meet the needs of a post-lockdown America.

The moment we were hoping for when the shutdowns started has arrived. We're not yet back to normal, but we can start to get back to work.

The federal government has an opportunity to lead America's economic and social recovery from the long COVID lockdown. Congress should seize that opportunity and show the country and the world how to do it right.

About Jim DeMint

DeMint represented South Carolina in the U.S. House (1999-2005) and U.S. Senate (2005-2013). Known for policy entrepreneurship, he authored leading conservative reforms to health care, education, taxes, and entitlements. DeMint garnered national acclaim from conservatives for leading efforts to ban congressional earmarks, which had been the source of billions of dollars of wasteful spending for decades and led to corruption and widespread abuse. He also successfully led the fight to stop the McCain-Kennedy amnesty bill in 2007.

He is the Founder of the Senate Conservatives Fund, which played a major role in the election of many of the Senate's leading conservatives like Mike Lee, Ted Cruz, Rand Paul, Marco Rubio, Ron Johnson, Pat Toomey, Ben Sasse, and Tom Cotton. He also served as the President of The Heritage Foundation for four years, taking the organization to new heights of influence. Under DeMint's direction, Heritage played a major role in the Trump transition, with the policy series "Mandate for Leadership" used as the basis for the President's first budget and numerous other administration reforms. During DeMint's tenure, Heritage partnered with the Federalist Society to create a list of possible Supreme Court judicial nominations that culminated in the confirmation of Justice Neil Gorsuch.

He is the author of the books *Now or Never: Saving America from Economic Collapse* (Center Street, 2012); *The Great American Awakening: Two Years that Changed America, Washington and Me* (B&H, 2011); and *Saving Freedom: We Can Stop America's Slide into Socialism* (Fidelis, 2009). His first book, with co-author J. David Woodard, is *Why We Whisper: Restoring Our Right to Say It's Wrong* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2007). His latest book, *Falling in Love with America Again* (Center Street, 2014) debuted at #1 on The Washington Post bestseller list. DeMint and his wife, Debbie, have four children who now are grown and married. They've taken a shine to being grandparents.