

May 8, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Minority Leader  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leader McConnell, Speaker Pelosi, Leader Schumer, and Leader McCarthy:

We urge you to ensure that future legislation to confront the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) will provide additional resources to bolster our health care system, strengthen our economy, and support our citizens during this unprecedented pandemic. As you continue negotiations for the next coronavirus package, we encourage you to include the provisions in our legislation – the *Repatriation Reimbursement Act* (S. 3598) – and appropriate adequate funding to the State Department to support implementation.

As you are aware, the spread of COVID-19 and subsequent travel restrictions issued globally left many American citizens stranded overseas as they sought to return to the United States. On March 19, 2020, the State Department issued a Level 4 Health Advisory advising Americans to avoid all international travel due to the global impact of the pandemic, leading many Americans to seek repatriation to the United States.

As a result of rapidly changing travel restrictions by the United States and the closing of borders and airports in numerous countries globally, many U.S. commercial airlines cancelled flights and failed to reimburse for such flights, or left Americans stranded without any return flight options. In their efforts to comply with Department of State travel guidance, Americans have been forced to pay often exorbitant – and always unanticipated – fees directly to U.S. commercial airlines for flights to return to the United States, or sign a promissory note to the State Department to commit to reimbursement for a flight chartered by the State Department’s Repatriation Task Force and U.S. Embassies around the world.

Given the precarious position of Americans who were stranded globally and the difficult economic conditions they may face upon return to the United States, our legislation would require the U.S. commercial airline industry and the State Department to fully reimburse and waive all travel costs for Americans who returned to the United States due to COVID-19. Commercial airlines would be required to provide cash reimbursements to all Americans for any international flight cancelled or rescheduled due to COVID-19, waive change fees, and prohibit airlines from charging passengers more for replacement tickets. The State Department would additionally be required to waive any travel expenses and make all promissory notes for such travel expenses null and void, as well as reimburse American citizens for any additional travel costs associated with returning to the United States. These provisions are critical to support our constituents, many of whom struggled to secure flights home to the United States and then paid or owe high sums in order to do so.

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Importantly, this bill would also eliminate the requirement that American citizens reimburse the State Department for repatriation fees during any future pandemic or international crisis. This will ensure equity among Americans seeking repatriation and enact a long-term policy fix that will support all citizens confronting a crisis during international travel.

We strongly urge you to include this important legislation in the next coronavirus package to ensure that American citizens are not burdened by the high cost of repatriation during a time of significant economic uncertainty. We thank you for your consideration, and look forward to working with you to finalize comprehensive legislation that will protect and support the American people.

Sincerely,



RICHARD BLUMENTHAL  
United States Senate



EDWARD J. MARKEY  
United States Senate



ELIZABETH WARREN  
United States Senate



TAMMY BALDWIN  
United States Senate



KAMALA D. HARRIS  
U.S. Senator