

July 21, 2020

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United States House of Representatives
1236 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Republican Leader
United States House of Representatives
2468 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Democratic Leader
United States Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

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

On behalf of the CEO members of Business Roundtable, we write to urge bold, bipartisan action to strengthen the public health and economic response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Alarming spikes in COVID-19 infections and hospitalizations, combined with the continuing economic crisis faced by many workers, small businesses and families, confirm the need for further federal policy responses and funding. Failure to act quickly and boldly will prolong the crisis and impose high long-term costs on the economy.

The June Business Roundtable CEO Economic Outlook Survey – administered before the current increase in COVID cases – clearly signaled that a severe economic contraction is underway and that CEOs expect continued COVID-19 disruptions to business and the economy. When asked when their company would recover to pre-COVID levels, most CEOs said they expected business conditions to recover by the end of 2021, though 27 percent did not expect recovery for their companies until after 2021. Conditions for small and mid-sized firms are even graver, with significant consequences for millions of families.

In the May 18 Business Roundtable letter to you, CEOs endorsed measures to support a more rapid and safe recovery. As Congress negotiates the next stage of COVID-19 response, we believe those recommendations remain valid and even more compelling. In particular, BRT supports:

Support for the public health response

The most important priority for the health of our economy is to bring infection rates under control. Business Roundtable believes it is critical to provide additional funding for testing and virus monitoring. In particular, Congress should increase funding to

expand sentinel testing—particularly among the vulnerable and those in contact with them—and ensure availability of testing sites in underserved areas and minority communities.

Widespread use of face coverings can play a key role in helping to prevent the spread of the virus. Business Roundtable has endorsed a national mask mandate, applied locally, and supports federal assistance to support the distribution of face masks to particularly vulnerable populations. To assist small businesses and severely affected industries in adopting safety measures, Congress should consider tax credits to offset the cost of screening, testing, personal protective equipment, and COVID-19-related facility upgrades.

For the most vulnerable workers, the 2% of the workforce that is over 65 with underlying health conditions, working from home or sheltering-in-place will remain vital. Congress should consider measures such as mental health and counseling services, as well as food security programs. Business Roundtable also supports further funding to enable public health best practices at congregate living facilities.

Business Roundtable also supports continued funding for the development of treatments and vaccines.

Action to protect jobs and livelihoods

Business Roundtable supports additional resources to alleviate the economic hardship faced by millions of Americans and address the disproportionate impact on minority communities. These resources should include targeted direct aid to struggling individuals and families that offer relief while encouraging a return to work. The employee retention tax credit should be enhanced to support continued employment. To prevent surprise state tax bills for employees working in a state outside their normal work location due to COVID-19, Congress should allow an employee's wages to be treated as being earned at their normal work location.

Because the unprecedented nature of the pandemic creates substantial legal risks that can slow recovery, Business Roundtable supports targeted protection against COVID-19 related liability for employers who take recommended measures to protect employees and customers. Narrowly-tailored liability protections will facilitate a safe and effective reopening of offices, retail outlets and manufacturing facilities. Congress should adopt time-limited measures to enable businesses to implement responsible screening, testing, tracing and tracking. To ensure the continued availability of personal protective equipment and other critical supplies such as sanitizer, Congress should also provide targeted liability protection to manufacturers and others involved in filling supply gaps.

Laying the groundwork for recovery

Small businesses and other employers hard hit by the crisis need further relief through additional funding options and business liquidity measures. Aid to employers in minority communities, and to the financial system serving such communities, can help relieve the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on minority workers and families. Business Roundtable encourages investments into Minority Depository Institutions and Community Development Financial Institutions, modernization of these lenders, establishment of mentoring relationships between these lenders and large financial institutions and leveraging of investments into minority communities by Treasury and the Federal Reserve.

It has further become clear that state and local governments will need significant additional support to maintain their vital services and continue public sector employment.

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly shifted more of American life online, such as learning, working and health care, and too many Americans lack the ability to use high-speed internet. These conditions call for improved access, affordability and usability of broadband, especially for rural and minority communities, small businesses, and lower income individuals and families. Business Roundtable supports legislation to improve coverage mapping, accelerate deployment, encourage private sector investment and increase and modernize federal investment. Successful approaches can include modernizing programs like Lifeline and E-Rate to make broadband more affordable, and establishing a significant, consistent and reliable funding stream to help close the rural and urban digital divide.

Congress should also support American jobs and communities through each stage of the recovery by keeping markets open, trade moving, and supply chains resilient. Sustaining transportation and delivery networks and the cross-border clearance of goods will preserve business operations and keep families well-supplied. Extending and expanding tariff deferrals and suspensions, as well as removing other trade barriers, will both enhance the public health response and accelerate the economic recovery. Support for supply chain diversification and flexibility without imposing broad mandates will improve reliability and capabilities. Given the global economic disruption from COVID-19, negotiations and cooperation with allies and trading partners will help Americans reach more customers and ensure that families have access to needed and affordable supplies.

Additional investments in education and worker training, especially for minority families, communities and workers

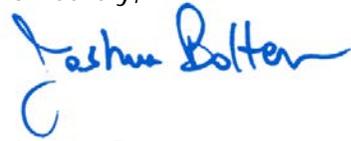
The country will not fully recover economically without safely reopening childcare facilities and schools. Many countries have managed this challenge successfully. Failure to reopen schools would have negative public health consequences and exacerbate a COVID-19 related student achievement gap. To help individuals and families manage through the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond, Business Roundtable supports additional resources for childcare providers to ensure greater access to affordable, quality care and early education. To address the needs of the K-12 educational system, Congress should build on the CARES Act Education Stabilization Fund including support for teachers, especially as it relates to capability for remote teaching. Additional, flexible resources are necessary for schools to mitigate lost state and local revenue, enable schools to implement procedures to either safely reopen or deliver effective online education where safe reopening is not possible, and protect and expand programs designed to reduce education inequities, including those related to funding and teaching quality. Congress should invest in improved high-speed internet access and devices necessary for underserved areas, both urban and rural, to engage in online learning during the COVID-19 public health crisis.

To help prepare workers for jobs in a post-COVID workforce, Congress should provide additional funding to support individual training accounts and employer-driven reskilling opportunities tied to in-demand jobs. Support should be provided to community colleges to develop or expand programs in high-demand careers, and Pell Grant eligibility should be expanded to include short-term training programs. Finally, Congress should provide additional resources to Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs) such as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and other educational institutions that serve populations disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Business Roundtable CEOs are committed to working with you to strengthen the country amid this global pandemic.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Joshua Bolten". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and a distinct "B".

Joshua Bolten
President & CEO
Business Roundtable