

Elizabeth Warren: To fight the pandemic, here's my must-do list

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The Senate needs to act now. There is no time to waste.

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EXCERPTS

Americans stayed at home and sacrificed for months to flatten the curve and prevent the spread of the coronavirus. That gave us time to take the steps needed to address the pandemic — but President Trump squandered it, refusing to issue national stay-at-home guidelines, failing to set up a national testing operation and fumbling production of personal protective equipment. Now, Congress must again act as this continues to spiral out of control.

Those who frame the debate as one of health versus economics are missing the point. It is not possible to fix the economy without first containing the virus. We need a bold, ambitious legislative response that does four things: brings the virus under control; gets our schools, child care centers, businesses, and state and local governments the resources they need; addresses the burdens on communities of color; and supports struggling families who don't know when the next paycheck will come.

Here's what the next federal response must include:

Start with funding the robust public health measures we know will work to address this crisis: ramped-up testing, a national contact-tracing program and supply-chain investments to resolve medical supply shortages. Without these measures, we will not be able to adequately reopen safely, more people will die and there will be no economic recovery.

Our schools face enormous challenges, like figuring out whether and how to safely reopen, how to help students who fell further behind because of distance learning — disproportionately students of color. The next legislative package should include at least \$500 billion to stabilize state and local governments and at least \$175 billion for our public schools to help them reopen safely, avoid teacher layoffs and provide the mental health and other services our children require.

No one can reopen schools by just snapping fingers. No matter what Betsy DeVos says.

Parents are drowning. Child care centers and schools are closed, yet essential workers are expected to still go to work each day, or night. Even parents who can work from home are expected to feed the baby and help their children learn while participating in Zoom calls. We cannot begin to have a recovery without affordable child care. The next relief package must include \$50 billion in emergency support to keep child care providers in business now and make long-term investments so more families can find affordable, high-quality and safe care in the future.

Rather than bullying businesses into reopening, then shielding them from liability when people inevitably get sick and die, let's instead make sure they have the resources necessary to put the health and security of their workers first, and enforceable safety standards set by OSHA. The Essential Workers Bill of Rights, which I proposed with Representative Ro Khanna, would include federal money for hazard pay, sick leave, family and medical leave, and enforceable health and safety protections for all essential workers.

While the virus continues to rage, extended unemployment coverage is critical. Rather than set arbitrary expiration dates for unemployment insurance, let's tie those benefits to real-time economic data. Families would be better off and we'd be investing in a stronger economic recovery.

The structural racism that has long existed in this country has caused the pandemic to hit Black and Latino neighborhoods and Indian Country especially hard. The next relief package must include Senate Democrats' proposal for at least \$350 billion immediately invested in these communities.

To avoid a tsunami that could put millions of people out on the street, Congress should extend and expand the national eviction moratorium, provide emergency rental assistance and increase funding for families experiencing homelessness. We should broadly cancel student loan debt so families don't have a student debt bomb waiting for them on the other side of this pandemic — a burden that again falls disproportionately on students of color.

Americans are generous, but if they're going to put up taxpayer money during this pandemic, we need strong anti-corruption protections like my CORE Act to make sure a bunch of Trump-connected businesses that can hire armies of lobbyists can't swoop up big chunks of relief funding.

Our constituents are counting on us to deliver the relief they desperately need. The House passed a relief bill over two months ago. Now the Senate must act to contain the virus and to provide the funding so that our economy, our schools and our families can begin to recover. This is about saving lives and livelihoods — and we don't have time to waste.

Elizabeth Warren is a Democratic senator from Massachusetts and a former presidential candidate.

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