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H. RES. 438

Third Reconstruction: Fully addressing poverty and low wages from the bottom up.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MAY 25, 2021

Ms. LEE of California (for herself, Ms. NORTON, Ms. BUSH, Ms. SEWELL, Ms. MOORE of Wisconsin, Ms. JACOBS of California, Mr. RASKIN, Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN, Mr. KAHELE, Mr. DESAULNIER, Mr. CICILLINE, Ms. MENG, Mr. GARCÍA of Illinois, Ms. SCHAKOWSKY, Mr. DANNY K. DAVIS of Illinois, Mr. LIEU, Mr. SAN NICOLAS, Mr. VARGAS, Ms. JACKSON LEE, Mr. RUSH, Ms. TLAIB, Mr. LOWENTHAL, Mr. JONES, Mr. GREEN of Texas, Mr. THOMPSON of Mississippi, Mr. CARSON, Mr. KHANNA, Ms. ADAMS, Ms. NEWMAN, and Mr. MCGOVERN) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Oversight and Reform

RESOLUTION

Third Reconstruction: Fully addressing poverty and low wages from the bottom up.

Whereas there are over 140 million people who are poor, low-wealth, or just one emergency away from economic ruin in the United States;

Whereas the injustice of poverty and low wealth is deeply entwined with the injustices of systemic racism, the denial of health care and ecological devastation, militarism, and the distorted moral narrative of religious nationalism that

seeks to blame the poor instead of addressing systems that cause poverty;

Whereas there are devastating consequences to these injustices, including that 250,000 die every year due to poverty and inequality alone;

Whereas our entire society suffers when over 40 percent of the country cannot fulfill their potential or fully participate in society;

Whereas these widespread conditions cannot be explained by blaming individual behaviors, nor are they inherent to our economy or society, but rather they are created and sustained by unjust and immoral laws, policies, systems, and structures;

Whereas we need the resolve to pass moral and just laws and policies that fully address these interlocking injustices, which have only deepened during the COVID-19 pandemic;

Whereas before the pandemic, 140 million people were poor, low-wealth, or one emergency away from economic ruin, including 52 percent of children (39 million), 45 percent of women (74 million), 60 percent of Black people (24 million), 64 percent of Latina/o people (38 million), 40 percent of Asian and Pacific Islander people (8 million), 59 percent of Native and Indigenous people (2 million), and 33 percent of White people (66 million);

Whereas the 140 million live in every region of the Nation, including 50 million in the South (Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia), over 40 million in Appalachia (Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, North Caro-

lina, New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia), with 8.6 million in New York alone, over 40 million in the Southwest/Border (Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico, Nevada, Texas, Utah), with 20 million in California alone, 20 million in the Midwest deindustrialized States (Ohio, Pennsylvania, Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, Wisconsin), 11 million in the Northeast (Connecticut, Delaware, Massachusetts, Maryland, Maine, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Vermont), over 7 million in the Northwest (Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, Washington, Wyoming), nearly 7 million in the Great Plains (Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota), nearly 700,000 in Hawaii, and 300,000 in Washington, DC;

Whereas systemic racism takes the form of laws and policies that target people of color, especially poor people of color, to create and deepen inequities in democracy, health, economic security, education, housing, jobs, policing, incarceration, criminalization, and immigration, which has contributed to the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on poor communities of color;

Whereas, since 2010, at least 25 States had passed new voter restrictions, imposing racist gerrymandering and redistricting, restricting early voting and voting hours, purging voter rolls, closing polling stations, and instituting onerous voter ID laws, and since the 2020 elections, 43 States have introduced over 250 new bills that further these restrictions and limit mail-in voting;

Whereas voter suppression laws disproportionately target poor, Black, brown, and Native people, they also pave the way for immoral policies that deny health care, living

wages, immigrant rights, women's rights, LGBTQ+ rights, and more;

Whereas nearly 50 million people are working for low wages, including at least 40 percent of Black and Latina/o workers and approximately 30 percent of White workers, and a majority (59 percent) of low-wage workers are women;

Whereas approximately 6 million essential workers are immigrants, including 5 million undocumented immigrants, and Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders are the highest represented subgroup among essential workers;

Whereas more than 25 million workers have been directly hurt by the economic impacts of the pandemic, and more than half of the low-wage jobs that were lost have not returned;

Whereas women carry a disproportionate share of unpaid care work, which would total \$1.5 trillion at the current minimum wage (\$7.25);

Whereas the average hourly wage that a full-time worker requires to afford a modest two-bedroom apartment is over \$23 per hour;

Whereas there are 30 to 40 million people at risk of homelessness, and an estimated 25 to 50 million people are facing food insecurity, including a disproportionate share of Black, Latina/o, American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, and multiracial households;

Whereas of the approximately 60 million adults with disabilities in the country, 26 percent are living below the poverty line, 10 percent are uninsured, and 7 million students with disabilities are enrolled in our public schools;

Whereas the official poverty measure (OPM) is an inadequate measure that does not account for today's cost of living, including child care, health insurance, and transportation, and even the supplemental poverty measure (SPM) does not account for all modern necessities or debt burdens that siphon household resources away from meeting basic needs;

Whereas the average cost of living in the Nation amounts to more than twice the OPM and SPM, close to \$60,000 for a household of four;

Whereas due to these limitations in the measure of poverty, social welfare and antipoverty programs have been underfunded, to the extent that only one-quarter of eligible families received TANF or Federal housing assistance, SNAP (food stamps) were reduced in 2017 to approximately \$1.40 per meal, and Head Start reaches only 54 percent of eligible 3- to 4-year-olds;

Whereas household debt burdens have grown to over \$14 trillion, and half of our families are having difficulty meeting usual household expenses, including approximately three-quarters of low-income households and Black and Latina/o families;

Whereas alongside mounting poverty, low wealth, debt, and economic desperation, poor communities and poor communities of color are hit first and worst by climate change, pollution, extreme weather, climate disaster, ecological devastation, and related health disparities, including during the COVID-19 pandemic;

Whereas an expansion of oil and fossil fuel infrastructure led to over 5,000 significant oil and gas leaks or ruptures on United States pipelines, more than 2,400 oil spills in

United States waters, and 1,100 coal ash ponds, all of which are disproportionately proximate to poor communities;

Whereas decades of residential segregation continue to expose, especially, Black communities to greater air pollution, as well as Latina/o, Asian and Pacific Islander, and poor and low-wealth communities;

Whereas Native and Indigenous reservations cover just 2 percent of the United States, and ancestral and sacred lands are at risk of being devastated by mining, extraction, and pollution, because of their vast mineral and natural wealth;

Whereas tens of millions of Americans cannot afford access to clean water, 44 million people are living with water systems that violated the Safe Drinking Water Act, and approximately 540,000 households lack access to complete plumbing, with Native American households more likely to face water access issues than other households;

Whereas despite these threats to health, 119 rural hospitals have been closed in 41 States since 2010, and 87 million people were uninsured or underinsured leading into the COVID–19 pandemic;

Whereas the United States has the worst-ranking public health outcomes among our peer countries, including the lowest life expectancy and highest infant and maternal mortality rates, even though we spend more than twice the amount per capita on health expenditures compared to other industrialized nations;

Whereas rather than addressing these pressing conditions impacting our health, well-being, and general welfare, 53 cents of every Federal discretionary dollar go to the Pen-

tagon, while only 15 cents go toward antipoverty programs;

Whereas experts have identified up to \$350 billion in defense spending cuts that would both save resources and keep the country safe and secure;

Whereas the United States wars since 2001 have killed more than 800,000 people and displaced 37 million more;

Whereas local and State law enforcement agencies have received over \$7.4 billion worth of equipment from the Department of Defense since 1990;

Whereas of the 19 million veterans in the Nation, 5.4 million are on disability, nearly 38,000 are homeless, and 7 to 18 percent of military families and veterans are on food assistance;

Whereas the United States is home to less than 5 percent of the world's population, but accounts for 20 percent of the world's incarcerated people, most of whom are poor and the poorest of whom are women and people of color, and 74 percent of those held in jail have not been convicted of any crime, but are too poor to be free before trial;

Whereas there have been over 1,000 police killings every year since 2013, with Black, Native, and Indigenous people more likely to be killed by police, yet 98 percent of police killings since 2013 have not resulted in a criminal charge;

Whereas nearly every American will know a gun violence victim in their lifetimes;

Whereas our strength as a Nation is greater when we welcome newcomers and immigrants, and immigrant families are vital members of our communities, yet our broken immigration system is harmful to immigrants and our soci-

ety as a whole, it is plagued by backlogs, processing delays, and overly complex policies, it criminalizes migration and prioritizes detention, deportation, and the economic and political exclusion of immigrants, and it relies on a largely for-profit detention system that detains tens of thousands of people and separates families;

Whereas although immigrants, regardless of status, pay more than \$490 billion in taxes, they are virtually excluded from all safety net programs;

Whereas White supremacist and far-right extremist groups have been recognized by the Federal Government as a predominant domestic security threat, however, every year we spend over \$1 trillion in endless wars, mass incarceration, policing, immigration, and border enforcement, none of which make us safer;

Whereas billionaires have added more than \$1.3 trillion to their collective wealth from March 2020 to February 2021;

Whereas these interlocking injustices are precipitating the deconstruction of our democracy and imposing unbearable costs to our economy, including that \$1 trillion is lost every year to the costs of child poverty, \$1.9 trillion of government revenue was lost by lowering the corporate tax rate in 2017, \$6.4 trillion has been lost in endless wars over the past two decades, the costs of the pandemic are estimated to be at least \$16 trillion, and inaction on climate change threatens the loss of life itself;

Whereas there was record turnout among the 64 million poor and low-income eligible voters in the 2020 elections, who did not vote for a return to “normal”;

Whereas moral policy that prioritizes the 140 million can lift this Nation from the bottom up, rather than waiting for wealth to trickle down; and

Whereas drawing on the transformational history of the first Reconstruction after the Civil War and the second Reconstruction of the civil rights struggles in the 20th century, this moment demands a third Reconstruction to revive our political commitment to implement moral laws and policies that can heal and transform the Nation: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved*, That—

2 (1) it is the sense of Congress to—

3 (A) recognize that—

4 (i) this country is founded on the
5 moral commitment to establish justice, en-
6 sure domestic tranquility, provide for the
7 common defense, promote the general wel-
8 fare and secure the blessings of liberty;

9 (ii) equal protection under the law is
10 nonnegotiable; and

11 (iii) it is a moral abomination that
12 there are more than 140 million people in
13 this country who are poor, low-wealth, or
14 one emergency away from economic ruin;

15 (B) recognize that the United States Fed-
16 eral budget is a moral document that exposes
17 the priorities and values of our Nation, how-

1 ever, addressing poverty has not been a top leg-
2 islative or budget priority; and

3 (C) recognize that these times require
4 moral policies aimed at fully addressing the
5 interlocking injustices of systemic racism, pov-
6 erty, the denial of health care and ecological
7 devastation, militarism, and the distorted moral
8 narrative of religious nationalism, as a third
9 Reconstruction to build an equitable, thriving,
10 and resilient economy from the bottom up; and

11 (2) Congress commits to heal the Nation, begin-
12 ning over the next two years, by—

13 (A) prioritizing and centering the needs of
14 the 140 million in laws and legislation, includ-
15 ing in infrastructure development, by—

16 (i) updating the poverty measure to
17 reflect what it takes to have a decent
18 standard of living in the United States
19 today and to establish a new standard for
20 social welfare programs that permanently
21 expand welfare benefits, provide cash as-
22 sistance programs, and guarantee adequate
23 incomes;

1 (ii) raising the minimum wage to a
2 living wage and guaranteeing the right to
3 form and join unions for all workers;

4 (iii) expanding unemployment insur-
5 ance and ensuring paid family and medical
6 leave for all workers;

7 (iv) implementing a Federal jobs
8 guarantee to increase public investments
9 and infrastructure in poor and low-income
10 communities that prioritize green and so-
11 cially beneficial industries, public health,
12 public education, care work, public transit
13 and roads, public utilities, broadband, sani-
14 tation and water services, climate resili-
15 ence, sustainable food production and dis-
16 tribution, libraries, fire stations, and cul-
17 tural work;

18 (v) guaranteeing safe and quality
19 housing for all by ending all evictions, can-
20 celling past due rent and mortgage pay-
21 ments and expanding the stock of afford-
22 able and public housing, as well as public
23 housing and rental assistance, rather than
24 expanding the shelter system;

1 (vi) guaranteeing the right to water
2 by ending water and utility shut offs and
3 making clean water and sanitation services
4 accessible to all;

5 (vii) guaranteeing accessible, diverse,
6 safe, high-quality, equitable public edu-
7 cation and accessible education infrastruc-
8 ture from pre-K–12 for all children, ensur-
9 ing that higher education is free to every-
10 one who wants to attend, and protecting
11 and expanding public resources for stu-
12 dents with disabilities;

13 (viii) guaranteeing quality health care
14 for all, enacting a universal single payer
15 national health care program that puts
16 people ahead of profits, expanding our
17 public health infrastructure to better ad-
18 dress social determinants of health, invest-
19 ing in Native American health through
20 fully funding the Indian Health Service
21 and social support for Native Americans,
22 and investing critical resources for health
23 care services and infrastructure in urban
24 and rural underserved communities;

1 (ix) enacting relief from student debt,
2 housing debt, utilities debt, medical debt,
3 and other household and personal debt
4 that cannot be paid; and

5 (x) ensuring that State, local, and
6 Tribal governments are adequately funded
7 so as to avoid bankruptcy or fiscal crisis;

8 (B) expanding and protecting the right to
9 vote, including by—

10 (i) restoring the full power of the Vot-
11 ing Rights Act by updating the
12 preclearance formula to cover all States
13 and political subdivisions with deep-rooted
14 histories of voter suppression and any and
15 all jurisdictions that recently passed voter
16 suppression laws or utilized voter suppres-
17 sion policies or tactics;

18 (ii) making election day a national
19 holiday;

20 (iii) establishing a fair redistricting
21 process that eliminates all forms of racist
22 and political gerrymandering, allows public
23 input, and guarantees that every vote
24 counts the same;

1 (iv) increasing polling locations so all
2 eligible voters have equitable access to the
3 polls;

4 (v) implementing no-excuse mail-in
5 voting in every State and requiring all
6 States to offer early voting to extend equi-
7 table timeframes and polling locations;

8 (vi) modernizing voter registration by
9 instituting online, same day, and automatic
10 voter registration; and

11 (vii) ensuring the right to vote for for-
12 merly and currently incarcerated people;

13 (C) complementing existing efforts and leg-
14 islation to eliminate persistent racial inequities
15 in education, health care, housing, jobs, wages,
16 Social Security and veteran benefits, land own-
17 ership, financial assistance, food security, vot-
18 ing rights, and the justice system that are root-
19 ed in our Nation's history of violence and dis-
20 possession of Native and Indigenous peoples,
21 250 years of chattel slavery, systemic racism,
22 and unjust immigration policies at the expense
23 of Black, Latina/o, Asian American and Pac-
24 ifier Islander, and Native Hawaiian peoples, in-
25 cluding through—

1 (i) a national commission to study
2 and develop proposals on reparations for
3 African Americans; and

4 (ii) a national truth, racial healing
5 and transformation commission, which can
6 include recommendations for restorative
7 processes and reparations for Indigenous
8 and other dispossessed people;

9 (D) protecting the constitutional rights of
10 assembly and free speech, including from crit-
11 ical infrastructure legislation and other
12 antiprotest legislation, including by—

13 (i) removing criminal penalties, fines,
14 or other costs for protest activities;

15 (ii) protecting all constitutional activ-
16 ity that occurs in the course of a protest;
17 and

18 (iii) retaining liability for public or
19 private actors for causing harm to pro-
20 testers;

21 (E) enacting comprehensive and just immi-
22 gration reform, including by—

23 (i) demilitarizing the southern border
24 and immigration enforcement, closing Im-
25 migration and Customs Enforcement

1 (ICE) Enforcement and Removal Oper-
2 ations, and limiting staff and authority of
3 the Border Patrol;

4 (ii) repealing and redressing manda-
5 tory detentions, deportations, child deten-
6 tions and family separations and reuniting
7 families;

8 (iii) ensuring regular and timely ac-
9 cess to legal documentation and residency;
10 and

11 (iv) making public welfare programs
12 available and accessible to all immigrants,
13 regardless of legal status;

14 (F) ensuring all the rights of Native and
15 Indigenous peoples and Tribal nations, includ-
16 ing by honoring treaties, guaranteeing the right
17 to the free expression of their religion, the right
18 to Native and sacred lands, and otherwise pro-
19 tecting against legislation or land transfers that
20 violate these sacred rights;

21 (G) embracing a bold agenda to transform
22 the economy away from climate chaos to a
23 green renewable energy economy that prioritizes
24 poor and low-wealth frontline communities and

1 builds up publicly owned and controlled green
2 energy infrastructure, including by—

3 (i) investing in a green infrastructure
4 package that provides for equitable public
5 transit, fixes roads and bridges, ensures
6 equitable and affordable housing, edu-
7 cation, and care work and access to
8 broadband, electricity, water, sanitation,
9 and other public utilities, expands public
10 health infrastructure, sustainable food pro-
11 duction and distribution, and community-
12 based institutions like libraries, fire sta-
13 tions, and recreation facilities;

14 (ii) dramatically curtailing air, water,
15 land, and climate pollution; and

16 (iii) creating resilient jobs to help
17 communities prepare for and respond to
18 climate-related disasters and promoting a
19 just worker transition;

20 (H) demilitarizing United States foreign
21 policy, borders, and policing, including by—

22 (i) cutting the military budget by at
23 least 10 percent and providing for a just
24 transition for workers in militarized indus-
25 tries;

1 (ii) ending the forever wars, repealing
2 existing Authorizations for the Use of Mili-
3 tary Force, and restoring Congress's war
4 powers, including over limited uses of force
5 such as airstrikes and drone attacks;

6 (iii) recognizing the three pillars of
7 foreign policy (diplomacy, development,
8 and defense) and pursuing diplomacy over
9 war, including reconsidering forward mili-
10 tary deployments, instituting a nuclear no-
11 first-use commitment, and moving toward
12 nuclear disarmament and curtailing the
13 use of broad economic sanctions that cre-
14 ate mass suffering;

15 (iv) repealing programs like the 1033
16 program that provides military equipment
17 and training to domestic law enforcement
18 agencies; and

19 (v) ending mass incarceration and vio-
20 lent policing, based on the demands of
21 grassroots organizations and communities
22 who are most egregiously impacted by
23 these injustices;

24 (I) enacting fair taxes on corporations,
25 Wall Street, and the wealthy, including by—

- 1 (i) repealing the 2017 tax cuts that
2 reduced the corporate tax rate and the top
3 marginal tax rate;
- 4 (ii) repealing tax breaks on fossil
5 fuels;
- 6 (iii) repealing tax breaks for pass-
7 through income;
- 8 (iv) instituting a financial transaction
9 tax on Wall Street;
- 10 (v) instituting a wealth tax;
- 11 (vi) taxing investment income the
12 same as income from work; and
- 13 (vii) otherwise making the tax code
14 less punitive for poor and low-income peo-
15 ple;
- 16 (J) alongside cuts to the Pentagon budget
17 and fair taxation, using deficit spending to meet
18 these pressing needs so as to end systemic rac-
19 ism, poverty, ecological devastation, and mili-
20 tarism and address the distorted moral nar-
21 rative of religious nationalism; and
- 22 (K) encouraging States and cities to enact
23 policies that follow the direction provided by
24 this resolution.

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