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

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JUNE 21, 2023

Ms. LEE of California (for herself and Ms. JAYAPAL) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Oversight and Accountability

RESOLUTION

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

Whereas, before the pandemic, there were over 140,000,000 people who were poor, low wealth, or just one emergency away from economic ruin in the United States;

Whereas pandemic relief programs that were long overdue temporarily relieved the load of poverty, reducing these numbers to 112,000,000, but were ended abruptly, precipitating a rise in these numbers once again;

Whereas, during this same time period, billionaire wealth increased by \$1,500,000,000,000, or over \$2,000,000,000 per day;

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 poverty is the fourth-leading cause of death in the Nation, higher than homicides, firearms, suicide, and diabetes, taking 290,000 lives every year, or 800 people a day, meaning we can no longer ignore policy violence nor deaths caused by policy;

Whereas our entire society suffers when nearly 40 percent of the country who are poor and one emergency from economic ruin 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 were deepened during the COVID–19 pandemic;

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 among the 140,000,000 people who were poor, low wealth, or one emergency away from economic ruin, were

52 percent of children (39,000,000), 45 percent of women (74,000,000), 60 percent of Black people (24,000,000), 64 percent of Latina/o people (38,000,000), 40 percent of Asian and Pacific Islander people (8,000,000), 59 percent of Native and Indigenous people (2,000,000), and 33 percent of White people (66,000,000);

Whereas these tens of millions of poor and low-income people live in every region, State, and county of the Nation, including approximately: 50,000,000 in the South (Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia), 40,000,000 in Appalachia (Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia), and over 8,000,000 in New York alone, over 40,000,000 in the Southwest/Border (Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico, Nevada, Texas, Utah), 20,000,000 in California alone, 20,000,000 in the Midwest deindustrialized States (Ohio, Pennsylvania, Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, Wisconsin), 11,000,000 in the Northeast (Connecticut, Delaware, Massachusetts, Maryland, Maine, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Vermont), 7,000,000 in the Northwest (Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, Washington, Wyoming), 7,000,000 in the Great Plains (Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota), 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, eco-

conomic 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;

Whereas 10 years after the Supreme Court gutted the Voting Rights Act in *Shelby v. Holder*, voting rights remain unprotected, unleashing an assault on voting rights and access to democracy, including that, since the 2020 elections, over 1,000 voter restriction laws have been introduced in all 50 States;

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 52,000,000 people are working for low wages, including at least 47 percent of Black workers, 46 percent of Latina/o workers and approximately 30 percent of White workers, and a significant number (40 percent) of low-wage workers are women;

Whereas approximately 12,000,000 essential workers are immigrants, including 5,000,000 undocumented immigrants, and Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders are the highest represented subgroup among essential workers;

Whereas women carry a disproportionate share of unpaid care work, which would total \$1,500,000,000,000 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 \$25 per hour;

Whereas there are 8,000,000 to 11,000,000 people at risk of homelessness, and an estimated 34,000,000 people are facing food insecurity, including a disproportionate share of Black, Latina/o, American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, and multiracial households, yet protections against evictions and hunger are being rolled back;

Whereas of the approximately 60,000,000 adults with disabilities in the country, 26 percent are living below the poverty line, 10 percent are uninsured, and 7,000,000 students with disabilities are enrolled in our public schools;

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 1 in 5 eligible families received TANF or Federal housing assistance, expanded SNAP (food stamps) were reduced to just \$6 per day and Head Start reaches only 54 percent of eligible 3- to 4-year-olds;

Whereas household debt burdens have grown to over \$17,000,000,000,000, and more than two-thirds of our families are having difficulty meeting usual household ex-

penses, including more than three-quarters of low-income households and Black and Latina/o families;

Whereas student debt amounts to \$1,600,000,000,000, impacting 44,000,000 households, and 100,000,000 Americans struggle with medical debt;

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 two 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, 44,000,000 people are living with water systems that violated the Safe Drinking Water Act, and approximately 540,000 households lack access to com-

plete 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, more than 450 rural hospitals are at risk of closure and 104,000,000 people were uninsured or underinsured leading into the COVID–19 pandemic;

Whereas the United States has the worst-ranking public health outcomes including that average life expectancy is at its lowest point since 1996, with higher infant and maternal mortality rates than our peer countries, even though we spend twice the amount per capita on health expenditures compared to other industrialized nations;

Whereas, during the deadliest phases of the pandemic, poor and low-income counties experienced death rates that were up to five times higher than wealthier counties;

Whereas rather than addressing these pressing conditions impacting our health, well-being, and general welfare, 62 cents of every Federal discretionary dollar goes to the Pentagon and militarization;

Whereas experts have identified up to \$350,000,000,000 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 937,000 people directly, and another 3,600,000 to 3,700,000 indirectly, and displaced 3,000,000 more;

Whereas local and State law enforcement agencies have received over \$7,600,000,000 worth of equipment from the Department of Defense since 1990;

Whereas of the 16,500,000 veterans in the Nation, 4,500,000 have a service-connected disability, more than 33,000 are homeless, and 1,200,000 receive 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 unable to make bail and therefore unable 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 society 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 \$490,000,000,000 in taxes, they are virtually excluded from nearly 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;

Whereas every year we spend over \$1,000,000,000,000 in endless wars, mass incarceration, policing, immigration, and border enforcement, none of which make us safer;

Whereas billionaires have added more than 1,500,000,000,000 to their collective wealth over the past two years;

Whereas these interlocking injustices are precipitating the deconstruction of our democracy and imposing unbearable costs to our economy, including that \$1,000,000,000,000 is lost every year to the costs of child poverty, \$1,900,000,000,000 of government revenue was lost by lowering the corporate tax rate in 2017, \$8,000,000,000,000 has been lost in endless wars over the past two decades, the costs of the pandemic are estimated to be at least \$16,000,000,000,000, and inaction on climate change threatens the loss of life itself;

Whereas there was record turnout among the 85,000,000 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 140,000,000 poor and low-income people can lift this Nation from the bottom up, rather than waiting for wealth to trickle down;

Whereas social movements committed to the needs and demands of poor and low-income people, including the Poor People’s Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival, Repairers of the Breach and the Kairos Center for Religions, Rights and Social Justice, have been calling for

transformational change and putting forward a Third Reconstruction Agenda; and

Whereas drawing on the 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;

11 (iii) it is a moral abomination that
12 there are 140,000,000 people in this coun-
13 try who are poor, low wealth, or one emer-
14 gency away from economic ruin; and

15 (iv) economic security should be guar-
16 anteed to all, and to that end, every indi-
17 vidual is guaranteed access to fundamental
18 economic rights, including the unqualified
19 right to—

- 1 (I) the opportunity to work in a
2 fulfilling occupation for a thriving
3 wage;
- 4 (II) an adequate income, suffi-
5 cient to meet basic needs and enjoy a
6 life with dignity, including for care
7 work inside of our own homes;
- 8 (III) safe, well-maintained, and
9 healthy housing for themselves and
10 their families within affordable reach
11 and without becoming cost-burdened;
- 12 (IV) accessible, quality education,
13 from child care to postsecondary edu-
14 cation;
- 15 (V) comprehensive health care
16 coverage with free choice of hospital
17 and provider;
- 18 (VI) access to free, secure, and
19 accessible banking services, including
20 fair credit and lending opportunities
21 to build generational wealth; and
- 22 (VII) a healthy environment and
23 sustainable climate that embraces re-
24 newable energy, clean air and water

1 quality, and eliminates environmental
2 health risks;

3 (B) recognize that the United States Fed-
4 eral budget is a moral document that exposes
5 the priorities and values of our Nation, how-
6 ever, addressing poverty has not been a top leg-
7 islative or budget priority; and

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

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

18 (A) prioritizing and centering the needs of
19 the 140,000,000 in laws and legislation, includ-
20 ing in infrastructure development, by—

21 (i) updating the poverty measure to
22 reflect what it takes to have a decent
23 standard of living in the United States
24 today and to establish a new standard for
25 social welfare programs that permanently

1 expand welfare benefits, provide cash as-
2 sistance programs, and guarantee regular
3 adequate incomes to all;

4 (ii) raising the minimum wage to a
5 living wage and guaranteeing the right to
6 form and join unions for all workers;

7 (iii) expanding unemployment insur-
8 ance and ensuring paid family and medical
9 leave for all workers;

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

21 (v) guaranteeing safe and quality
22 housing for all by enacting rent control
23 policies, ending all evictions, canceling past
24 due rent and mortgage payments and reha-
25 bilitating and expanding the stock of af-

1 fordable and public housing, as well as
2 public housing and rental assistance, and
3 housing people experiencing homelessness
4 through “Housing-First” principles, rather
5 than expanding the shelter system;

6 (vi) guaranteeing the right to water
7 by ending water and utility shut offs and
8 making clean water and sanitation services
9 accessible to all;

10 (vii) guaranteeing accessible, diverse,
11 safe, high quality, equitable options for
12 universally affordable child care and public
13 education and accessible education infra-
14 structure from pre-K–12 for all children,
15 ensuring that higher education is free to
16 everyone who wants to attend, and pro-
17 tecting and expanding public resources for
18 students with disabilities;

19 (viii) guaranteeing quality health care
20 for all, enacting a universal single payer
21 national health care program that puts
22 people ahead of profits, expanding our
23 public health infrastructure to better ad-
24 dress social determinants of health, invest-
25 ing in Native American health through

1 fully funding the Indian Health Service
2 and social support for Native Americans,
3 and investing critical resources for health
4 care services and infrastructure in urban
5 and rural underserved communities;

6 (ix) enacting relief from student debt,
7 housing debt, utilities debt, medical debt,
8 and other household and personal debt
9 that cannot be paid;

10 (x) ensuring every individual can ac-
11 cess financial and credit services free of
12 deceptive or unnecessary fees and lending
13 discrimination, but with meaningful com-
14 munity reinvestment; and

15 (xi) ensuring that State, local, and
16 Tribal governments are adequately funded
17 so as to avoid bankruptcy or fiscal crisis;

18 (B) expanding and protecting the right to
19 vote, including by—

20 (i) restoring the full power of the Vot-
21 ing Rights Act by updating the
22 preclearance formula to cover all States
23 and political subdivisions with deep-rooted
24 histories of voter suppression and any and
25 all jurisdictions that recently passed voter

1 suppression laws or utilized voter suppres-
2 sion policies or tactics;

3 (ii) making election day a national
4 holiday;

5 (iii) establishing a fair redistricting
6 process that eliminates all forms of racist
7 and political gerrymandering, allows public
8 input, and guarantees that every vote
9 counts the same;

10 (iv) increasing polling locations so all
11 eligible voters have equitable access to the
12 polls;

13 (v) implementing no-excuse mail-in
14 voting in every State and requiring all
15 States to offer early voting to extend equi-
16 table timeframes and polling locations;

17 (vi) modernizing voter registration by
18 instituting online, same-day, and automatic
19 voter registration; and

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

22 (C) complementing existing efforts and leg-
23 islation to eliminate persistent racial inequities
24 in education, health care, housing, jobs, wages,
25 Social Security and veteran benefits, land own-

1 ership, financial assistance, food security, vot-
2 ing rights, and the justice system that are root-
3 ed in our Nation’s history of violence and dis-
4 possession of Native and Indigenous peoples,
5 250 years of chattel slavery, systemic racism,
6 and unjust immigration policies at the expense
7 of Black, Latina/o, Asian American and Pac-
8 ifier Islander, and Native Hawaiian peoples, in-
9 cluding through—

10 (i) a national commission to study
11 and develop proposals on reparations for
12 African Americans; and

13 (ii) a national truth, racial healing
14 and transformation commission, which can
15 include recommendations for restorative
16 processes and reparations for Indigenous
17 and other dispossessed people;

18 (D) protecting the constitutional rights of
19 assembly and free speech, including from crit-
20 ical infrastructure legislation and other
21 antiprotest legislation, including by—

22 (i) removing criminal penalties, fines,
23 or other costs for protest activities;

1 (ii) protecting all constitutional activ-
2 ity that occurs in the course of a protest;
3 and

4 (iii) retaining liability for public or
5 private actors for causing harm to pro-
6 testers;

7 (E) enacting comprehensive and just immi-
8 gration reform, including by—

9 (i) demilitarizing the southern border
10 and immigration enforcement, closing Im-
11 migration and Customs Enforcement
12 (ICE) Enforcement and Removal Oper-
13 ations, and limiting staff and authority of
14 the Border Patrol;

15 (ii) repealing and redressing manda-
16 tory detentions, deportations, child deten-
17 tions, and family separations, and reunit-
18 ing families;

19 (iii) ensuring regular and timely ac-
20 cess to legal documentation and residency;
21 and

22 (iv) making public welfare programs
23 available and accessible to all immigrants,
24 regardless of legal status;

1 (F) ensuring all the rights of Native and
2 Indigenous peoples and Tribal Nations, includ-
3 ing by honoring treaties, guaranteeing the right
4 to the free expression of their religion, the right
5 to Native and sacred lands, and otherwise pro-
6 tecting against legislation or land transfers that
7 violate these sacred rights;

8 (G) embracing a bold agenda to transform
9 the economy away from climate chaos to a
10 green renewable energy economy that prioritizes
11 poor and low-wealth frontline communities and
12 builds up publicly owned and controlled green
13 energy infrastructure, including by—

14 (i) investing in a green infrastructure
15 package that provides for equitable public
16 transit, fixes roads and bridges, ensures
17 equitable and affordable housing, edu-
18 cation, and care work and access to
19 broadband, electricity, water, sanitation,
20 and other public utilities, expands public
21 health infrastructure, sustainable food pro-
22 duction and distribution, and community-
23 based institutions like libraries, fire sta-
24 tions, and recreation facilities;

1 (ii) dramatically curtailing air, water,
2 land, and climate pollution; and

3 (iii) creating resilient jobs to help
4 communities prepare for and respond to
5 climate-related disasters and promoting a
6 just worker transition;

7 (H) demilitarizing United States foreign
8 policy, borders, and policing, including by—

9 (i) cutting the Pentagon budget by
10 phasing out outdated weapons systems and
11 eliminating waste, fraud, and abuse;

12 (ii) reviewing the moral, economic,
13 and social consequences of spending 62
14 cents of every Federal discretionary dollar
15 on militarization;

16 (iii) ending the forever wars, repealing
17 existing Authorizations for the Use of Mili-
18 tary Force, and restoring Congress' war
19 powers, including over limited uses of force
20 such as airstrikes and drone attacks;

21 (iv) recognizing the three pillars of
22 foreign policy (diplomacy, development,
23 and defense) and pursuing diplomacy over
24 war, including reconsidering forward mili-
25 tary deployments, instituting a nuclear no-

1 first-use commitment, and moving toward
2 nuclear disarmament and curtailing the
3 use of broad economic sanctions that cre-
4 ate mass suffering;

5 (v) repealing programs like the 1033
6 program that provides military equipment
7 and training to domestic law enforcement
8 agencies; and

9 (vi) ending mass incarceration and
10 violent policing, based on the demands of
11 grassroots organizations and communities
12 who are most egregiously impacted by
13 these injustices;

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

16 (i) repealing the 2017 tax cuts that
17 reduced the corporate tax rate and the top
18 marginal tax rate;

19 (ii) repealing tax breaks on fossil
20 fuels;

21 (iii) repealing tax breaks for pass-
22 through income;

23 (iv) instituting a financial transaction
24 tax on Wall Street;

25 (v) instituting a wealth tax;

1 (vi) taxing investment income the
2 same as income from work; and

3 (vii) otherwise making the Tax Code
4 less punitive for poor and low-income peo-
5 ple;

6 (J) alongside cuts to the Pentagon budget
7 and fair taxation, using deficit spending to meet
8 these pressing needs so as to end systemic rac-
9 ism, poverty, the denial of health care and eco-
10 logical devastation, and militarism and address
11 the distorted moral narrative of religious na-
12 tionalism; and

13 (K) encouraging States and cities to enact
14 policies that follow the direction provided by
15 this resolution.

○