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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

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CONGRESSIONAL CHILDREN'S CAUCUS

April 3, 2009

Vice President Joe Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. Vice President:

I respectfully write to request your assistance in our attempt to use the stimulus funds for unemployment benefits in the state of Texas. I request that you use all of your available resources to get federal stimulus money into the hands of Texans. As you are aware, on February 13th 2009 the Congress passed H.R. 1, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, (ARRA) and subsequently on Tuesday, February 17th 2009 President Obama signed the ARRA, H.R. 1. The Act provided that Texas would receive \$36 billion in overall assistance and \$555 million in federal funds specifically targeted for unemployment assistance.

Following this restorative action by the United States Congress and the President, Texas Governor Rick Perry decided to reject \$555 million in federal stimulus funds on Thursday, March 13, 2009. These funds were appropriated in Title II of the ARRA and gave the states 45 days in which to act. I am very concerned and troubled by the decision of the governor to refuse ARRA funding. With overall consumer spending down drastically and an unemployment rate of 6.4%, this rejection was illogical to millions of hardworking Texans, both employed and unemployed.

Current economic data indicate that 26,000 Texans are filing new unemployment claims each week. The people of our state need help now. One-fourth of Texans, or

Current economic data indicate that 26,000 Texans are filing new unemployment claims each week. The people of our state need help now. One-fourth of Texans, or approximately 5.2 million do not have health insurance and three out of four uninsured Texas children are eligible for Medicaid or State Children's Health Insurance Program, (SCHIP), but are not enrolled. Texas has the highest uninsured rate in the nation and the problem is growing. Health insurance contributes significantly to other economic problems and can often lead to catastrophic economic results. It was inadvisable to inject what appear to be partisan motives into the solutions to some very serious problems for the state of Texas.

Texas is not immune from the national economic crisis. The number of unemployed Texans has risen by 132.2% since last year. The unemployment stimulus money can make a real difference in the daily lives of Texans as they try to make ends meet. We owe it to them to utilize these funds provided through this legislation. Texans cannot wait.

According to the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER), the U.S. economy entered a recession in December 2007. This recession has already lasted longer than the median length of the 10 previous recessions that have occurred since World War II. If forecasters are correct that the economy will continue to contract through the first half of 2009, this recession would be the longest of the post-war period. The rise in unemployment was also modest until it began rising more quickly in September 2009. Congress has moved decisively and the President has signed the legislation.

The situation in Texas is dire and urgent. By October, more than 300,000 Texans could be out of work. To reject funds targeted to families in tough times is not grounded in any fundamental economic theory and is grossly irresponsible.

The people of the State of Texas want the stimulus funds. Indeed, to ensure that the money is received, several measures introduced in the Texas State Legislature that seek to circumvent the governor's decision have been introduced. Those bills: SB 826 introduced on February 11, 2009 by State Senator Rodney Ellis, SB 573, introduced on January 28th, 2009 by State Senator Eddie Lucio, Jr. and SB 377, introduced on December 16th 2008 by State Senator Leticia Van de Putte are rational attempts to improve the unemployment system in Texas, and help qualify the state for federal stimulus dollars.

In a letter dated February 24th 2009, the aforementioned Texas State Senators implored the governor to intervene and designate the reform of the Texas Unemployment System an emergency issue.

In their letter the State Senators stated, "While Texas does not yet face double digit unemployment, as Michigan does, the economic forecast is not rosy. According to the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts, the Texas economy will lose 111,000 jobs in 2009, and the unemployment rate is expected to rise from 6 to 8.2 percent." The letter further stated, "*The recently passed Economic Recovery Act offers \$555.7 million to*

Texas to shore up its shaky unemployment fund, but the state must first pass a series of reforms to be eligible. Unfortunately, even as Texas accepts stimulus funds, some continue to say the state should reject unemployment funding, simply because it requires small changes to the program."

This letter (see attached) underscores the sentiment felt by many Texans who are desperately seeking to find employment so that they can feed their children and pay their rent and mortgages, and put gas in their automobiles. Given the difficult economic circumstances it was unreasonable to reject the federal stimulus funds because accepting the money would result in a putative increase in taxes.

Because of the urgency of the issue and deadline of a response within 45 days, we request that you utilize all of your resources to ensure that millions of Texans do not lose out on the chance to receive economic support at this time when many are in dire straits. The actions by the Texas state legislature underscore the urgency of our economic situation and the impact on families is not liberal or conservative, Democratic or Republican---it is real and painful.

We urge you to support our efforts to ensure that these much needed funds go to the people of Texas. Please call me, Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee at 202.225.3816 if you have any questions or concerns.

Very Truly Yours,

Members of Congress

Sheila Jackson Lee

Solomon Ortiz

Gene Green

Silvestre Reyes

Charles Gonzalez

Al Green


Henry Cuellar

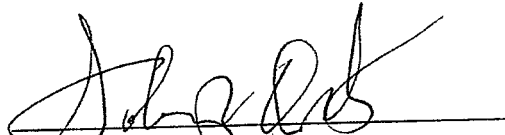
Chet Edwards


Ciro Rodriguez

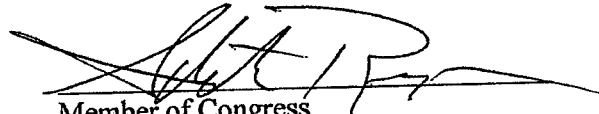
Lloyd Doggett

Eddie Bernice Johnson


Sheila Jackson Lee, Member of
Congress

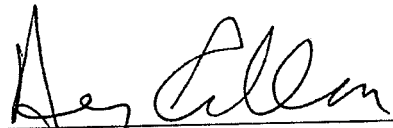

Member of Congress

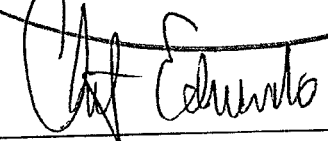

Member of Congress

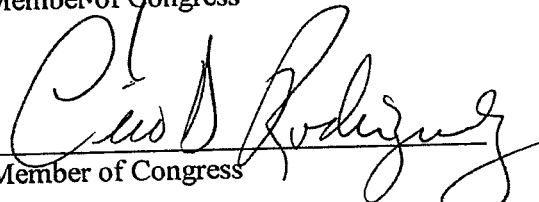

Member of Congress

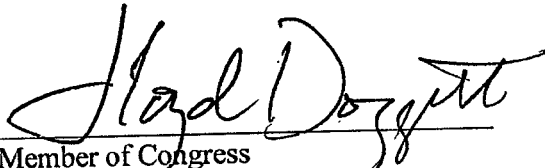

Member of Congress

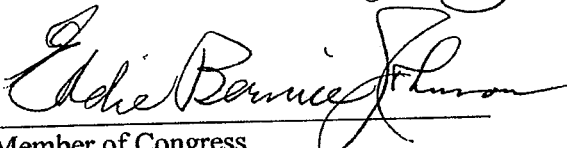

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