

AMERICAN PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

May 5, 2020

Senator Mitch McConnell
Senator Chuck Schumer
Speaker Nancy Pelosi
Representative Kevin McCarthy

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted many deficiencies in the preparedness of our country for dealing with a world-wide disaster. The nation's medical, public health, and emergency infrastructure was unprepared for the many and multilevel challenges. While we can point to many contributing factors, in this letter we wish to speak from the American Philosophical Society's history – particularly the commitment of our founder, Benjamin Franklin, to the promotion of “useful knowledge.”

The effort to curb the spread of this disease has confronted Americans with drastic, life-altering changes in individual and collective behavior. While based on the best available medical and scientific expertise, these changes have been difficult for many to understand and accept, leaving the nation vulnerable to misleading and erroneous information. Rather than the deliberative, logical and analytical thinking that the country urgently needs, we find a disturbing skepticism toward evidence-based policy-making; a reluctance to accept and apply scientific knowledge; and a lack of familiarity with the relevant lessons of history, including long-past and more recent pandemics.

We therefore ask you to consider a bold initiative to re-energize education in this country as an essential part of the recovery from our current national emergency. This effort draws inspiration from the National Defense Education Act of 1958, a successful legislative initiative to support education in response to a clear international challenge.

WHEREAS, Factual evidence and fact-based decisions are the foundation of the nation's strength and growth, and whereas, the promotion of education emphasizing the natural and social sciences, analytical thinking, and fact-based decision-making is essential for the nation's welfare, it is

RESOLVED, That Congress enact a “National Defense Education Act for the 21st Century” to support at all levels the education of American's youth in science, history, analytical thinking, and the primacy of facts as the foundation of the nation's future health, general well-being, and security.

Linda Greenhouse

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