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## Commentary: U.S. Senate must deliver a global pandemic response

BY BETH ELLEN HOLIMON AND JIM HENNIGAN

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Beth Ellen Holiman

Dining for Women, headquartered in the Upstate, is a powerful community of concerned individuals engaged in education, advocacy and grant-making dedicated to achieving global gender equality. Many of its grantees across the planet are doing work that either supports the prevention of pandemics or responds to their spread.

Dining for Women members come together in almost 500 chapters across the country to learn about issues impacting women and girls globally, advocate for international development aid that supports women's interests, and give charitably to support organizations working to empower and create opportunities for women and girls globally.

Each month, Dining for Women members like the two of us have the privilege of hearing the firsthand experiences and wisdom of women in developing nations and how they are responding to the numerous challenges of surviving and thriving. Lately we're hearing, month after month, how COVID-19 is setting back their work by years if not decades.

In response, Dining for Women members have opened up our wallets by giving grantee organizations the freedom to spend grants, typically around \$50,000 each over up to two years, as they see fit to sustain their missions in the face of COVID-19.

We do this in a spirit of partnership. Across miles and oceans, Americans are key stakeholders, not distant spectators, as vulnerable populations around the globe weather the onslaught of COVID-19. In particular, we know from history how the

fate of women in developing nations has a direct and profound impact on American interests.

Our advocacy partners with RESULTS tell us Congress should contribute at least \$20 billion for international development in its next COVID-19 supplemental measure, including \$4 billion for the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria; \$4 billion for Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance; and \$2 billion for anti-hunger efforts. The U.S. Global Leadership Coalition and InterAction concur with these needs.

This sum is negligible compared to what we'd spend to resolve future pandemics and catastrophes that would inevitably flow from our indifference.

Together, volunteers with RESULTS and Dining for Women have been calling on Congress to make this strategic investment in our national security and public health. So you might imagine our dismay when we learned the House of Representatives' HEROES Act omitted funding for the critical global components of responding to the global pandemic.

In South Carolina, our allies include U.S. Reps. William Timmons and Joe Wilson, who support global responses and the Global Fund's vaccine programs that provide a backstop that keeps the next pandemic from reaching our shores – as there is no assurance we only have to combat one pandemic at a time. Gavi is praised for its work across partisan lines, earning express praise from President Trump.

Right now, the next COVID-19 response measure is before the U.S. Senate. They may act any day now, but the draft measure we've seen falls far short of what's needed. Most alarmingly, the Senate's HEALS Act shortchanges Gavi and omits

supplemental funding for the Global Fund whose vital programs are destined to grind to a halt within weeks if the Senate drops the ball.

U.S. Sens. Tim Scott and Lindsey Graham are key decision-makers as to whether the COVID-19 supplemental measure will include an adequate global response. America depends on their leadership to ensure the HEALS Act does not neglect the world's broader health crises by falling short on the \$20 billion package needed to prevent the worst aspects of extreme poverty and food insecurity that have emerged.

As COVID-19 is teaching us, the cost of failure abroad is too high to bear there and here.

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**TAGS**

COVID-19	HEROES ACT	U.S. SENATE	DINING FOR WOMEN	GENDER EQUALITY	RESULTS
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