

**Katko & Murphy Push for Establishment
of Commission To Make Sure America
is Not “Caught Off Guard” Again**

WASHINGTON, DC – With debate underway about how to keep Americans safe while getting the economy back on track, The Ripon Society and Franklin Center hosted a virtual meeting on Wednesday with two leaders in Congress who are spearheading the effort to not only do just that, but make sure the country is better prepared if – and when – another pandemic strikes again.

Those leaders are U.S. Rep. John Katko (NY-24), Chairman of the Republican Governance Group, and U.S. Rep. Stephanie Murphy (FL-7), a Co-Chair of the Blue Dog Coalition. As prominent members of these Republican and Democratic groups, they have collaborated in the past to hammer out bipartisan solutions for the issues of the day. According to Murphy, the response to the pandemic is no different.

“As we all know, this public health crisis has had a significant impact on people’s lives and well-being, but also on their livelihoods,” the Florida lawmaker stated. “It can seem like there’s a lot of partisanship up here in Washington, but I think if you look at Congress’s response you should take heart that within about six weeks we were able to pass four massive bipartisan bills to try to help both the health and economic challenges that we’re facing as Americans. I think that’s pretty impressive if we think about the speed that Congress usually acts.”

According to Murphy, the HEROES Act, which recently passed in the House, contained some of the policy proposals that she has been working on with Katko.

“One of the provisions in that bill that I’m particularly proud of is one that John and I co-sponsored and introduced and it’s the expansion of the employee retention tax credit. The ERTC was originally included in the CARES package and it provides an advanced refundable tax credit to help employers retain their employees in active furlough status during the COVID-19 crisis. John and I worked in a bipartisan way. We have six Democrats and six Republicans and then myself on the bill to expand ERTC so that we can backstop about 80% of payroll up to \$45,000 on an annual basis. I believe that it’s a way in which we can provide a lot of these businesses the runway that they need to recover as we begin a slow and smart reopening of the economy.”

A second proposal the two have been working on is the establishment of a commission to better understand the U.S. response to COVID-19 and provide recommendations going forward.

“I think the American people deserve to know the full truth about why our country appears to have been caught off guard by this pandemic,” Murphy stated. “When I worked at the Department of Defense, I worked on pandemic planning, and we always did after action reports. I think it’s important that when we get through this pandemic – on the other side of this –we do an accounting of what went right and what went wrong and how our government can better protect the American people.

“It’s not about pointing fingers and it’s not about political partisan score settling. The goal is to make sure the U.S. is stronger and more resilient in the face of future pandemics. The commission would do three key things. First it would examine how COVID-19 emerged and spread in the U.S. Second, it would evaluate our country’s preparedness for and in response to the pandemic. Third, it would issue a report to Congress, the President, and the American people with a full accounting of what occurred and recommend concrete steps that the U.S. public and private sector can take to prevent, prepare for, respond to, and mitigate the harmful impact of future pandemics. We styled it after the 9/11 Commission



Reps. Stephanie Murphy (left) and John Katko (right).

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and there are a number of proposals out there to do assessments of our response, but I believe this is one of the few bipartisan ones and I’m deeply committed to the idea that in order for anything to get done in this Congress, it has to be done in a bipartisan way.”

Katko agreed.

“What’s smart about this bill is that it’s not a ‘gotcha’ piece of legislation,” he stated. “It’s not about finger pointing. It’s set up in such a way to avoid that. It doesn’t start doing the analysis of what happened here until after the pandemic has gone – most likely early next year. We can stop and have a sober analysis of just

what went right and what went wrong, just like we did with the 9/11 Commission. The commission created a lot of good policy, identifying the problems and what we can do better. From that has been born a much safer country.”

Following their remarks, Katko and Murphy were asked a number of questions, including one about how Congress can encourage people to return to the workplace when, in some cases, they are being paid more by the government to remain at home.

“A lot of people are making more money on unemployment than they have in their lives,” Katko observed, referring to the extra \$600 in unemployment benefits approved as part of the CARES Act. “I think that was an important thing to do in order to pump money into the economy. There’s been some very serious discussions about perhaps providing a bonus to get people to go back to work. I’m open to all kinds of suggestions, because as important as it was to put that extra money into people’s pockets, we ultimately need to get people back to work to get the economy going again.”

Murphy took a different approach

“We’re having problems with unemployment,” she said. “But the problem is not necessarily that people are on it. The problem is that people are having trouble accessing it. Beyond that, I would say that the issue of getting people back to work is broader than whether unemployment incentivizes folks to stay at home. The bigger issue is that we’re in a pandemic. We are not in a recession. It is an economic situation caused by a pandemic. And until we address the health care issues that caused us to shut down in the first place, I think it’s going to be hard to get people back to work.”

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