**DES MOINES REGISTER LETTER TO EDITOR AUGUST 30, 2021**

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**Congress should require adequate pay and benefits for front-line workers**

When members of Congress reconvene, different committees will be marking up the $3.5 trillion reconciliation legislation.

This includes major investments in the child care, preschool, direct care, and public health workforces. The Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee will develop the reconciliation language for investments in child care, preschool, and public and community health. The Senate Finance Committee will develop language to extend the enhanced federal match for home-and-community-based services under Medicaid and to extend the child tax credit.

In addition to expanding the numbers of front-line, essential workers in these helping and caregiving professions, the White House has committed to upgrading the compensation and benefits these workers receive. This should be part of the mark-up.

Child care workers, preschool teachers, direct care workers in hospitals and nursing homes as well as those providing in home care and services, and community health workers must be recognized as the essential workers they are. Their work must be valued and, at a very minimum, compensation start at least at $15 per hour and included comprehensive benefits, as recommended by the White House.

These workers are the “workforce behind the workforce,” and they also are a source of jobs and employment. Upgrading their compensation supports the economy in multiple ways. Regardless of the views on other parts of the reconciliation legislation, all Iowa members of Congress should get behind these provisions as critical to the health of Iowa’s society and Iowa’s economy.

*— Charles Bruner, Ames*