

For months, Senate Republicans have consistently supported a targeted rescue package, under \$1 trillion, focused on the same kinds of policies that we have actually settled on today. As far back as July, and all autumn, Republicans have consistently supported a targeted package right in the ballpark of this total amount, with exactly the same kinds of policies in the mix.

The package that will shortly become law falls exactly within the ballpark of what Senate Republicans have been proposing and trying to pass since last summer. This is eerily similar to what we were trying to pass last summer.

Compare the shape of this major agreement with the shape of what I proposed all the way back in late July. Yes, some fine details are different. There is no doubt this new agreement contains input from our Democratic colleagues. It is, of course, bipartisan. But those matters could have been settled a long time ago as well.

Why did it take all this time? We know why. We have heard Democrats say openly that they were not willing to deal all summer and fall but are willing now—willing now—because they have a President-elect of their own political party. That is not my accusation; that is their admission. They have been pretty candid about it.

So, look, I am glad we have gotten this done. My Democratic colleagues and I have had good discussions this past week. Both parties have a lot to be proud of. But I really regret that some on the Democratic side decided that partisan Presidential politics were more important than getting urgent and noncontroversial relief out the door much sooner to families who have needed this help badly.

The progress of this past week could have happened in July or August or September or October. Senate Republicans were advocating for a package just like this one all along in realtime. I just wish our partners on the other side had put political calculations aside and worked with us to make this happen a long time ago.

However, with that said, I appreciate the earnest conversations of this past week. I want to thank the Democratic leader, Speaker PELOSI, Leader MCCARTHY, as well as, in particular, Secretary Mnuchin, who has been tireless in these discussions throughout. Both sides, in both Chambers, have really stepped up and worked hard to get this done.

We will be moving forward with the start of the pandemic relief and full-year funding legislation for the Federal Government, as well, and I hope we can do this as promptly as possible.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, after weeks of intense bipartisan negotiation, the leadership of both Chambers, as well as the White House, have reached an agreement on an emergency Federal relief package. The agreement on this package could be summed up by the expression “better late than never,” although I know many of my Republican colleagues wished it was never.

After a long and arduous year, after a year full of bad news, finally, we have some good news to deliver to the American people. Make no mistake about it, this agreement is far from perfect, but it will deliver emergency relief to a nation in the throes of a genuine emergency.

It should have the votes to pass the Senate, the House, and reach the President's desk to become law. We should make that happen as soon as possible—as soon as possible—even tonight, if we can.

By all rights, a bill of this urgency should have passed 8 months—should have passed months ago. The country needed it.

But we all know what happened. The Republican majority caused more than 8 months of delays and gridlock. Twenty Members of the Senate majority wanted no money. And what the Republican leader simply forgets, for months, he said: Let's examine the crisis; let's put it on pause, while Democrats were demanding more action.

And then when he produced legislation, it didn't have what was needed and had poison pills, a provision that would give all corporations—no matter how egregious their behavior—immunity and nothing to help the unemployed, no direct checks.

So the idea that this delay was caused by Democrats is “Alice in Wonderland” history. It was caused by a Republican majority that didn't want to vote for the moneys desperately needed by the American people. The significance of this package, even though it is not as large or robust as it should be, should not be underestimated. We will deliver the second largest Federal stimulus in our Nation's history. Only the CARES Act will have been bigger—only the CARES Act, which I was proud to negotiate with Secretary Mnuchin.

In size and scope, this bill will exceed the Recovery Act passed in the aftermath of the financial crisis. And once this Federal relief bill is signed into law, Congress will have allocated well over \$3 trillion in relief this year alone. That is a historic figure to match a historic crisis. It will give the new President a boost—a head start—as he prepares to right our ailing economy. The economy is in a deep, deep hole because of President Trump and the Republican Senate's failure to act in a timely manner.

But this, at least, begins us getting the relief the American people need so

that when President Biden takes over, he can do more and help us dig out of this deep hole.

And the good news, too, the poison pills that so stopped any progress put in by the majority leader are not in this bill. It won't include any provision to limit the legal rights of workers who were put in harm's way or any provision to gratuitously limit the authority of the Fed.

Now, it is remarkable how far we have come. As I mentioned earlier, this summer, the Republican leader admitted 20 Members of his caucus didn't want to vote for another dime of COVID relief. Before negotiating with Democrats, the majority offered a package of \$500 billion that contained poison pills designed to doom the thing from the start. That way, Republican Senators wouldn't be forced to approve any new spending. Here at the end of the year, reason has prevailed—sweet reason—and we will now deliver a package of almost a trillion dollars.

That matters not for any one party. It matters for the American people because we increased the size of this bill, expanded its reach. More Americans will receive assistance before the holidays. For Americans who have lost their jobs through no fault of their own, this bill will throw out a safety net.

Initially, Republicans were ready to let enhanced unemployment benefits expire. They were ready to move on without help for renters. They opposed another round of direct payments. Their starting offer for UI and rent relief was zero, zero, and zero again.

The good news that transcends any of the obstacles that we faced is that in the final agreement, we will extend all three Federal unemployment programs created under CARES. We will provide \$300 in weekly Federal unemployment benefits for the next 10 weeks. For families struggling to make ends meet, this bill will cushion the blow.

A new round of survival checks will soon be on the way—\$600 per adult, another \$600 for every dependent in the household. Many of us would have liked that to be higher, but at least this is the quickest way to get money into pockets of the American people, sending their tax dollars right back where they came from. Of course, as I said, it is not as much as many Democrats and some Republicans would have liked, and we hope that next year the same bipartisan support that emerged behind \$1,200 stimulus checks will provide even more assistance to working families.

For the first time ever during this pandemic, Congress will provide \$25 billion in direct rental assistance to help reduce the burden on Americans who have fallen behind on their rent. We also extend a moratorium on evictions to give our fellow citizens more time to get back on their feet.

For small business owners, we are providing businesses the opportunity to take another draw of the popular

Paycheck Protection Program. Crucially, this bill will provide \$12 billion for minority-owned and very small businesses that struggled to access financing during the earlier rounds of PPP. Local newspapers and local broadcasters will have access to this assistance as well as nonprofits—I worked very hard to see that this happened—and our nonprofit religious institutions. Our churches and our synagogues and our mosques—no collection plate, no income, but so vital to social services and so needed during a time of crisis—will, once again, get the help they need—something that I authored in the CARES bill.

I am especially pleased that this bill will provide money for bars and restaurants and \$15 billion in SBA grants for theater operators and small venue owners through the Save Our Stages Act. These venues are so important to my State and many States across the country. They are the lifeblood of our communities. They were first to close and will be the last to open. This bill gives them a fighting chance.

Of course, today's agreement will give a major boost to our battle against the disease itself. There will be more than \$30 billion to support the procurement and distribution of the coronavirus vaccine, ensuring that it is free and rapidly distributed to everyone.

Today's agreement includes all this and more—support for childcare, food assistance, agricultural relief, the Postal Service, and funding to help families gain access to broadband. So the American people have a great deal to celebrate in this legislation, but, of course, the agreement we reached is far from perfect. It leaves out direct State and local assistance. Despite desperate pleas from Governors, mayors, and economists across the spectrum, the Republicans stubbornly refused to provide direct aid to State and local governments. Over a million public employees have already lost their jobs. It doesn't matter if you are working for a small business and get laid off or if you are working for a government and are laid off; you still need to feed your family. So why is there such a difference on this side of the aisle between these same people—flesh and blood? Because some work for the government, they don't get help, but because some work for a small business, they do. Both should get help.

State revenues, of course, are significantly down across the country in States red and blue. The continued opposition to State and local funding from the Republicans remains deeply irresponsible. It will force States to make painful decisions to cut jobs and potentially raise taxes on working families, and it will hurt the economy of the entire country as millions more government workers are laid off at a time when we are struggling to recover—hurting us all.

Still, the Democrats refused to let State and local governments be com-

pletely left behind. Today's agreement does include aid for specific State-level expenses—\$82 billion for education funding, \$27 billion in payments for testing and State healthcare programs, \$45 billion for transit systems. I am very proud of the fact that New York's MTA will receive the money it needs to keep going. It is so vital to our city's economy and something I worked very hard for.

Make no mistake—these funding sources are not a replacement for direct aid to State and local governments, and we Democrats will continue to fight for those in the new year. But in this case, a rose by any other name smells not quite as sweet, but at least it brings some relief. State and local governments will receive assistance in a number of different ways.

When this Chamber gavel back in in 2021, we must pick up where we just left off. We have given the administration a vital headstart, but make no mistake about it—our economy is in a deep, deep, deep hole, in part, because of the Trump administration's lack of policy in fighting the coronavirus. Now we will have to help them. This is a good start, but a lot more needs to be done. We must continue to protect people's jobs whether they work for a company or a local government. We must do so much more, and we have to start building and stimulating our economy so it gets out of the hole with things like infrastructure and wiring every home with broadband and improving our healthcare and education systems and so much more—so much more.

Let me be very, very clear about one thing. Once this deal is signed into law, it cannot be the final word on congressional relief. There is more to do in the new year with a new administration that has a much more favorable attitude toward giving the American people the help they need. The bipartisan agreement is simply a downpayment. It will establish a floor, not a ceiling, for coronavirus relief in 2021.

Over the course of this challenging year, tens of millions of Americans have been pushed close to the breaking point. They have lost their jobs. They have lost their homes. Many can't feed their families. Many have lost neighbors, colleagues, friends, and family to this vicious, vicious disease. They have such great pain—a pain that we can only distantly empathize with because it hasn't happened directly to us here.

As the pandemic enters its worst phase, we will continue to be isolated from one another, but behind closed doors, desperation mounts for millions and millions of our fellow Americans. This bill is for them—for them—to carry them to a brighter day.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HOEVEN). The Senator from Ohio.

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, first, I am delighted that we are finally at the point at which we are passing legislation to deal with the COVID-19 crisis that has gripped my State and our

country. We have a healthcare pandemic, and we have an economic crisis. I am pleased to say that, on a bipartisan basis, we are now coming together as we did 9 months ago with the CARES Act. It shouldn't have been 9 months, but we now have a targeted bill that focuses on providing a bridge between now and the time at which the vaccines will be widely available. We need the help. The economy is faltering, as was just said, but also the healthcare crisis in my home State and in so many other places has gotten worse. So it is past time.

I am told I have given 21 speeches on the floor about the bipartisan nature of this. There are so many areas of common ground, and I was pleased to be part of the 10-person bipartisan group who put together our own package over the last month. I think that helped to encourage leaders on both sides to see that there was a lot of common ground, that there were ways for us to come together.

One of my colleagues is on the floor with me now, Senator STABENOW of Michigan. She is one of those Democrats whom I spoke to over a month ago about this bipartisan process, and we talked about the common ground and the ability for us to find ways to move ahead to help those small businesses that truly are struggling; individuals who, through no fault of their own, lost their jobs because of the economic crisis that was precipitated by the pandemic; and to help our schools and to help our healthcare providers and to help ensure that we are doing what we can here to help at the local level to respond to this crisis.

GREAT LAKES RESTORATION INITIATIVE ACT OF 2019

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, I am on the floor tonight to join my colleague Senator STABENOW of Michigan to ask our colleagues to support legislation that has to do with the Great Lakes. It is called the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative. We are asking to reauthorize that legislation.

This is one of those public-private partnerships that work. It is not only public, like Federal public, and private; it is Federal, State, local, and private individuals coming together to figure out how to keep our Great Lakes the amazing treasure that they are.

I represent Lake Erie. It is on the north coast of Ohio. It is the most shallow and also the most fertile of the Great Lakes. It has incredible fishing. There is a gigantic, \$7 billion fishing industry in the Great Lakes. A lot of it is recreational fishing—\$7 billion. It is being threatened right now, really, by a few different things. One is these Asian carp, so-called "bighead carp," that are coming up into the lake. We are doing all we can to keep them out, but this funding, the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, focuses on that issue to keep the carp from ruining Lake Erie as they have ruined other