

that will help us do our basic jobs. Senate Democrats just objected to transparency. This means they are against giving us the facts, against ensuring accountability, and against getting targeted help to the right people. My colleague is choosing to prevent the Senate from receiving information that is pertinent to our ongoing negotiations.

Senate Republicans believe in relief of those hurt by COVID-19. We want to help our small businesses. We want to help those who have lost their jobs. We want to make sure families are able to survive this crisis and come out on the other side with their health and livelihood.

My colleague's objection shows that Senate Democrats are not actually interested in finding a bipartisan solution to our Nation's problems. Instead, they want to blindly spend money on provisions completely unrelated to COVID, as if there are no consequences to racking up more debt and spending beyond our means.

I am thinking about the kids who are just like me, growing up in public housing, with parents who are barely scraping by. We need to help those families. In order to do that, we need to better understand where the need is.

I am disappointed in my colleague's decision, and I hope he reconsiders.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. SMITH). The Senator from Utah.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. LEE. Madam President, the bill before the Senate this week is not really about COVID relief; it is about politics. Before this, COVID relief has not been a terribly partisan issue. In fact, we have passed 5 relief bills, each with at least 90 votes. That means they are overwhelmingly broad-based and bipartisan efforts. So if this one were to pass, it would be the first of those to have passed that has been highly controversial. Why? Because, in the first place, it borrows and spends another \$1.9 trillion when there are still hundreds of billions of dollars of unspent relief money from past COVID-19 relief packages. The new spending authorizes money to go to projects in States and local governments, including many that may not even need it.

The fight against the pandemic has, of course, fundamentally changed in the months since this plan was first devised and proposed. It is already outdated. Now, as we are here, into the month of March, the circumstances have changed, yet the plan remains largely the same as it was. So it feels a little bit, to me, like we are fighting the last war using the last war's battle plan, leaving us unprepared for the battle actually in front of us.

This is a bill that will worsen our national debt and weaken our economy in the long run without even doing much to help small businesses and American families in the short term.

This is not without consequence. In fact, as the book by Drs. Reinhart and Rogoff, published nearly 10 years ago—a book known as “This Time Is Different”—notes, once we get into this cycle, once we get accustomed to spending this much and acquiring this much of a debt-to-GDP ratio, we find ourselves in dire circumstances—circumstances in which it is even more difficult to raise the same revenue based on the same tax structure or even while tweaking that tax structure, it can be very difficult to pull out of the tailspin that could be produced when we start spending in sums this large and perpetuating a debt-to-GDP ratio that is, frankly, unsustainable.

This \$1.9 trillion package has very, very little to do with COVID-19. In fact, only 1 percent of the spending in this bill will go toward accelerating vaccine distribution; just 5 percent is focused on public health. Instead, according to the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, three times as much money will go toward partisan priorities that are “not directly related to the current crisis.”

What are some of the examples of this type of spending? Well, we have \$1.5 billion more set aside for Amtrak, which is itself already sitting on \$1 billion of unspent bailout money. What this has to do with the virus and why the virus somehow justifies giving them an additional \$1.5 billion when they are already sitting on \$1 billion of still unspent bailout money is beyond my comprehension. There is \$50 million in funding for environmental justice projects, also difficult to connect that up to COVID; \$200 million for the Institute of Museum and Library Services; \$135 million for the National Endowment for the Arts; \$135 million for the National Endowment for the Humanities; \$86 billion in a pension bailout for private sector workers.

The list goes on and on, but you get the idea. You get money that goes to projects, as well as a significant amount to State and local governments. We will get back to that in a moment. When there is as much as \$63 billion leftover in unspent funds, this money will not necessarily even help schools to reopen.

And \$350 billion in aid goes to State and local governments, even though total losses to date have mostly been covered by the \$360 billion that Congress has already provided in aid for State and local governments over the last year. While there is some disparity among and between the States and how they have responded to the COVID pandemic and how they fared as far as their revenues, State and local revenue has mostly recovered, and while 26 States saw general revenue decline, 21 States actually saw revenue gains. In fact, my home State of Utah, as well as some other States, is running surpluses. Utah's sacrifice and good governance should not go to bail out other profligate States to the tune of \$350 billion.

I think about hard-working moms and dads in Utah, struggling to make ends meet while paying their Federal and State taxes. They are told over and over and over again that they have to be giving more. They are told that what they have spent and the time they have allotted—weeks or months out of every year just to pay their Federal tax alone—still somehow isn't enough, isn't nearly enough because, in addition to the money that they have worked so hard to earn and give to the Federal Government, there is so much more that has to be spent, like \$1.5 billion going to Amtrak, even though it is already sitting on \$1 billion of unspent bailout relief.

These same moms and dads throughout Utah are not pleased when they are made to understand that, in addition to bailing out Amtrak again when Amtrak is already sitting on this \$1 billion in unspent bailout relief money, they are also going to have to bail out other States; they are going to have to bail out State and local governments that haven't been managed well, as Utah's government has. This isn't fair to them. This is a matter of fundamental fairness to them and to countless Americans, not only in Utah but in every State.

Some States still have unspent funding that they have gotten from previous COVID relief packages. California alone has \$8 billion in unspent funding, and New York has up to \$5 billion. In this bill, we are acting like States are facing a fiscal catastrophe that is specifically from COVID when they are not.

At the same time, we are acting like the unprecedented magnitude of Federal debt is a nonissue. It is not. We have got this situation exactly backward.

Look, any new relief funding just needs to be targeted, and it needs to be temporary, and it needs to be directly tied to COVID relief. This package is, instead, about fulfilling the political wish list of one political party over another and has very little, if anything, to do with the pandemic. It is offensive, and, yes, it is inappropriate for one political party—the political party that clings to the narrowest of margins of a majority in this body—to push its own political wish list onto an opportunity to provide COVID relief for the American people, and it would be equally inappropriate for Republicans to use it as an opportunity to push their own wish list.

Look, we haven't seen this before. We haven't seen anything like this before. We didn't, in the past, see any of the previous COVID relief packages pushed through reconciliation. There are a number of reasons for that, one of which was it is wrong. It is not an appropriate use of reconciliation. Another was, it wasn't necessary because we made it bipartisan, not just mildly bipartisan with a few straggler votes here or there but overwhelmingly so.

This one is different. I am not opposed to discussing what role government should play in providing actual relief from the pandemic. We can and should have that debate. I welcome it. I would love to have it right now. In fact, that is a question that I think merits its own debate. This bill is not about that, not anything close to that. It is riddled with poor economic reasoning and rank political favoritism. It will only worsen our debt and our economic health in the long run. It doesn't help America's small businesses and families in the short run. It doesn't do anything to materially advance the cause of getting our children back to school at a time when they have suffered so greatly, not only academically but socially and in so many other ways. That is where we ought to be focused.

This bill comes nowhere close to addressing that issue, and, instead, it directs itself in other directions that are not only helpful, but in many cases they are the opposite of that.

It is sad. It is disappointing. And on that basis, I can't support this bill but would urge my colleagues to figure out ways to make it better. We don't have to do it this way. It doesn't have to be a deeply partisan vote. We can still choose a different path. I, for one, hope we will.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Pennsylvania.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. TOOMEY. Madam President, the circumstances that we face today in the Senate are so disturbing. This is really, really unbelievable. I mean, there is so much good news out there on the healthcare front, on the pandemic front, on the economic front. But what we are going to do in this Chamber is absolutely, absolutely appalling.

The Members of this Chamber came together five times last year and passed overwhelmingly bipartisan bills to deal with this pandemic, to deal with the economic crisis that came from the lockdown that we experienced—five times, about \$4 trillion, completely unprecedented in scope and scale, the nature of it. Never imagined before, but we did it. We did it because we needed to, and we came together. I think it was the biggest of the bills passed—the biggest by far—without a single “no” vote in this whole Chamber, completely bipartisan.

So President Biden gets elected, gives a great speech, a great inaugural speech, about uniting the country, coming together: We don't have to be divided the way we have been. We can work together and find common ground.

So 10 Republican Senators go down to the White House and say: Well, Mr. President, I know you would like to do \$1.9 trillion, whatever it is, but we think there is a good case for \$600 billion.

Now, I don't happen to agree with those 10 Republican Senators, as it happens. I don't think even that is appropriate, but they did. And the reason that is significant is that there were 10 of them, which just so happens to be exactly the minimum number needed of Republican Senators to join with the Democrats to pass anything they want on a bipartisan basis. So there, handed to him on a silver platter, to the President, was the opportunity to do a bipartisan bill to figure out where that common ground was. The Republicans were offering to negotiate from there. This probably could have ended easily at \$1 trillion or so after just weeks before passing a \$1 trillion bill. The President could have gotten so much of what he wanted, but President Biden didn't want any part of that. You have to ask yourself, why is that when he campaigned as the guy who is going to unify America, and he had every Republican vote he needed sitting in his office, asking him to work this out? He said: No, not interested. Effectively, that is what he said.

Well, when you look at the bill, it is clear why President Biden chose this path, because there is no justification for this bill. There is no medical justification. There is no pandemic justification. There is no economic justification. This isn't about coming together and doing something about a crisis; this is about a partisan leftwing wish list. And, of course, Republicans aren't interested in that kind of political gesturing that is going to do economic damage.

I am reminded of the words of Rahm Emanuel, who famously said: “You never want a serious crisis to go to waste.” Rahm Emanuel must be very proud of our Democratic colleagues and President Biden because what they have done is they have taken a crisis that is rapidly receding—let's be honest—and they decided this is their chance to make one last mad dash to the door with a staggering amount of money and presumably claim credit for the recovery that is already well underway.

The good news is—there is a lot of good news, right? We went through one of the most trying times we have been through in a very long time in this country. This pandemic was devastating. It was deadly, it was scary, and the economic crisis was very, very real. But now we have over 100 million doses of vaccines that have gone into people's arms. You figure that we might very well have 100 million Americans who have had the disease and recovered. We have to have well over half of the American population who has either recovered or been vaccinated and is therefore no longer at risk to this disease—not a significant risk. That is fantastic news.

By the way, the vaccine administration is accelerating. Following that, we are unsurprisingly seeing this terrific collapse in the number of new cases. The daily count of new cases of the

coronavirus, of COVID-19, peaked at around 250,000 new cases in a single day. We were running at that pace. By the time we got to the inauguration of President Biden, we were down to 185,000, and yesterday was about 60,000. So we are less than a quarter of the number of new cases on a daily basis that we were experiencing at the peak, and it continues to drop. It is going to continue to decline probably very rapidly as we continue to roll out these vaccines. That is terrific.

There is a sort of parallel recovery of the economy underway. If you go back to April of 2020, when it was at its worst, the unemployment rate was almost 15 percent, 14.8 percent. That is a terrible, terrible unemployment rate. As of January of this year, just a few months ago, the unemployment rate was 6.3 percent, less than half of where we were. We are not back to the fantastic economy we had a year ago just before this pandemic broke, but we are getting there. Eighteen States across the country have unemployment rates below 5 percent, so we are going to get there.

The economy is growing. After a collapse in the second quarter of last year, the third quarter came roaring back, and the fourth quarter grew. The Congressional Budget Office thinks that in this whole calendar year of 2021, our economy will grow almost 5 percent. Most private economists think it will be more than that. There is a lively debate about whether we will even reach 6 or 7 or more percent growth. We were told never again to expect to see 3 percent. But that is how strong this economic recovery is because of the resiliency of the American people, the tremendous ingenuity of the private sector to come up with vaccines that are incredibly effective—several of them—and do it in a record time, I mean a fraction of what was the previous record time. It is amazing.

And yes, you know what, we played a role in this too. I think we did. The bipartisan cooperation of Congress to pass one bill after another on a huge scale—like I said, five bills. The biggest was without a single dissenting—actually, I am not sure any of them had a dissenting vote in the Senate. And there was almost a trillion dollars in December, leaving tens of billions of dollars that we approved that haven't even been spent yet. The intended beneficiaries haven't gotten the money yet. It takes a little while to get the money out the door.

Given this context, given this history, this is why it is so dispiriting to see our Democratic colleagues insisting on a bill that has almost nothing to do with COVID. That is the truth. It is not about reopening the economy; it is a partisan leftwing spending binge. That is what it is. Let's take a look at some of the individual items.

We have these so-called stimulus checks—I never heard anything more inaptly named—\$414 billion. The fact is, real, personal income in the country