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## NATIONAL

# New COVID relief bill passes Congress, signed by president

A new round of aid is headed to jobless workers, struggling businesses and to people who are doing just fine, as part of a long-awaited relief bill that was signed into law Dec. 27.

The bill included a \$900 billion package billed as coronavirus stimulus, combined with \$1.4 trillion in government funding, a water infrastructure bill, and dozens of other unrelated bits of legislation. It's the longest bill ever passed by Congress, almost twice as long as the previous record. It was negotiated behind closed doors by the Democratic and Republican leaders in the House and Senate, with Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin representing the White

House. Released at 2 p.m. Dec. 21, it passed hours later, with no hearings and no amendments, by lawmakers who couldn't possibly have read what they were voting on. Officially, it was a 5,593-page Senate amendment to a bill that had passed the House, the U.S.-Mexico Economic Partnership Act, which promotes academic and vocational exchanges. It passed 92-6 in the Senate, with all four Oregon and Washington senators voting for it. In the House it was split into two bills: The stimulus part passed 359-53 with support from all Oregon and Washington representatives; the government funding bill passed 327-85, with Oregon representatives Earl Blumenauer and Peter

DeFazio voting against.

It was a chaotic and hurried end to a process that dragged out seven months, ever since the House passed its version of a second-round stimulus bill May 15. The first round, known as the CARES Act, passed in March and included a \$600-a-week increase in unemployment benefits and a one-time check of \$1,200 per adult taxpayer. The supplemental unemployment benefit expired July 31, but Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) refused to allow a vote on an extension.

As this issue went to press, Congress was considering increasing the new stimulus check from \$600 to \$2,000. -DM

## WHAT'S IN THE BILL

**Stimulus checks** A one-time \$600 cash payment per adult, plus \$600 per child.

[Payments phase out for those with incomes over \$75,000 (\$150,000 per household)]

**Enhanced unemployment benefits** An extra \$300 a week through March 14.

**Help for small businesses** \$285 billion for a second round of the Paycheck Protection Program for small businesses impacted by the pandemic [Businesses and nonprofits with under 300 employees whose revenues dropped at least a quarter can get a forgivable loan of up to 2.5 times average monthly payroll costs, up to \$2 million.]

**Help for renters** Eviction moratorium extended to Jan. 31; \$25 billion in rent assistance

**Help for industries** \$15 billion to extend the Payroll Support Program for aviation workers to April 1; \$1 billion in payroll grants for airline contractor employees; \$15 billion for theaters and other live venues; \$82 billion for schools and universities; \$10 billion for child care; \$14 billion for transit systems, Amtrak and airports.

**COVID vaccine** \$69 billion to speed distribution of the vaccine

**Enhanced food stamps** \$13 billion to increase food stamp benefits by 15%

**Special interest tax breaks** \$9 billion for the alcohol industry, \$6.3 billion for business lunches; and other tax breaks for fossil fuel and alternative fuel producers, NASCAR racetrack owners, electric motorcycle makers, and thoroughbred horse owners

## UNION ORGANIZING

## Workers unionize at So Delicious Dairy Free

By Don McIntosh

At So Delicious Dairy Free in Springfield, Oregon, a unit of 107 workers has joined Teamsters Local 206. How they did it is rare: In an era when most companies hire union busters, So Delicious voluntarily recognized the union after letting workers make their decision on the union without interference.

So Delicious, which makes non-dairy frozen desserts, is a subsidiary of the giant French multinational Danone, best known in the United States for its Dannon yogurt brand. Danone acquired So Delicious in 2017 when it bought natural foods conglomerate White Wave. Danone then signed a union neutrality agreement with the Teamsters, United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW), and the Bakers Union covering facilities in the United States. Under the agreement, once a union demonstrates it has support from 30% of a unit, union organizers can enter the work site to talk with workers on break.

"This is the way the process should work," said Teamsters



Dairy Conference director Rome Aloise.

The Springfield effort began when union rep Mark MacPherson handed out fliers announcing a day-long open house at the union hall half a mile down the road. It was billed as a chance to ask questions and find out what Dannon workers in Portland had won through Teamsters representation. MacPherson says 55 workers showed up to the event, and 53 signed union cards on the spot. At that point the company let the union set up a tent in the parking lot. Two weeks later, the

election took place.

MacPherson said Danone is a socially conscious company that treats employees well. At the Danone-owned YoCream plant in Northeast Portland, the company joined the Teamsters Western Conference pension plan; it's rare these days for newly union companies to sign onto a guaranteed pension. Still, workers at the So Delicious plant in Springfield have things they'd like to improve. The lowest paid jobs aren't much above minimum wage, and a mandatory six-day workweek is causing burnout and turnover.

## WORKERS' RIGHTS

## Gov. Kate Brown proposes more money for labor law enforcement

Oregon Labor Commissioner Val Hoyle — having worked two years to get the most bang out of the budget she inherited from predecessor Brad Avakian — is asking the Oregon Legislature to give her agency an additional 25 full-time staff. That would bring Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries (BOLI) to 131.5 staff — back to its staffing level of 22 years ago.

BOLI's mission is to protect the rights of Oregon's 1.9 million workers under state labor and civil rights laws, and to oversee apprentice training programs. Judging by three decades of flat or declining staff levels at BOLI, those things haven't been a priority for the Oregon Legislature. Hoyle hopes to change that, making a case that protecting workers' rights is worth the investment.

On Dec. 1, her request got a half thumbs-up from Governor Kate Brown. In the governor's

recommended two-year budget for 2021-23, Brown proposed giving BOLI the equivalent of 11 additional staff, though Brown didn't support Hoyle's proposal of creating a six-person enforcement unit to police labor laws in the cannabis industry.

Hoyle was grateful, she said in a Dec. 1 press statement.

"For decades, Oregon has not fully invested in the critical work of this agency," Hoyle said in the statement. "The Bureau of Labor and Industries is less than half the size it was 40 years ago."

In the end, neither Hoyle nor Brown will determine BOLI's budget. That's up to the Legislature, its Joint Ways and Means Committee, and particularly the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Transportation and Economic Development. Based on past practice, lawmakers will most likely hold budget hearings in February and March and vote on the budget in mid-May.