



Jose Luis Magana/AP Photo

Top Capitol Hill negotiators sealed a deal Sunday on an almost \$1 trillion COVID-19 economic relief package.

Congress reaches agreement on \$900B coronavirus relief

By ANDREW TAYLOR
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Top Capitol Hill negotiators sealed a deal Sunday on a \$900 billion COVID-19 economic relief package, finally delivering long-overdue help to businesses and individuals and providing money to deliver vaccines to a nation eager for them.

The agreement, announced by congressional leaders, would establish a temporary \$300 per week supplemental jobless benefit and a \$600 direct stimulus payment to most Americans, along with a new round of subsidies for hard-hit businesses and money for schools, health care providers and renters facing eviction.

It came after months of battling and posturing, but the negotiating dynamic changed in Republicans’ favor after the election and as the end of the congressional session neared. President-elect Joe Biden was eager for a deal to deliver long-awaited help to suffering people and a boost to the economy, even though it was less than half the size that Democrats wanted this fall.

Biden praised the bipartisan spirit that produced the measure, which he called “just the beginning.”

“This is a model for the challenging work ahead for our nation,” Biden said in a statement.

House leaders informed lawmakers they would vote on the legislation on Monday, and the Senate was likely to vote on Monday, too. Lawmakers were eager to leave Washington and close out a tumultuous year.

“There will be another major rescue package for the American people,” Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., said in announcing the agreement for a relief bill that would total almost \$900 billion. “It is packed with targeted policies to help struggling Americans who have already waited too long.”

Democrats acknowledged it wasn’t as robust a relief package as they initially sought — or, they say, the country needs. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi vowed more to come once Biden takes office.

“It is a first step,” she said. “We have to do more.”

“Oregon families and small businesses face a holiday season like few others in American history more than nine months into this public health crisis and its dev-

astating economic impact,” said U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore. “I’m glad this package will provide relief on multiple fronts statewide and will keep pressing in the new year to get Oregon communities all the help that’s needed to weather this crisis.”

A fight over Federal Reserve emergency powers was resolved Saturday night by the Senate’s top Democrat, Chuck Schumer of New York, and conservative Republican Pat Toomey of Pennsylvania. That breakthrough led to a final round of negotiations Sunday.

Still, delays in finalizing the agreement prompted the House to pass a one-day stop-gap spending bill to prevent a government shutdown at midnight Sunday. The Senate was likely to pass the measure Sunday night as well.

The final agreement would be the largest spending measure yet. It combined \$900 billion for COVID-19 relief with a \$1.4 trillion government-wide funding plan and lots of other unrelated measures on taxes, health, infrastructure and education. The government-wide funding would keep the government open through September.

‘ANYONE WHO THINKS THIS BILL IS ENOUGH DOES NOT KNOW WHAT’S GOING ON IN AMERICA.’

Chuck Schumer of New York | U.S. Senate’s top Democrat

Passage neared as coronavirus cases and deaths spiked and evidence piled up that the economy was struggling. The legislation had been held up by months of dysfunction, posturing and bad faith. But talks turned serious in recent days as lawmakers on both sides finally faced the deadline of acting before leaving Washington for Christmas. “This bill is a good bill. Tonight is a good night. But it is not the end of the story, it is not the end of the job,” Schumer said. “Anyone who thinks this bill is enough does not know what’s going on in America.”

The \$300 per week bonus jobless benefit was one half the supplemental federal unemployment benefit provided under the \$1.8 billion

CARES Act in March and would be limited to 11 weeks instead of 16 weeks. The direct \$600 stimulus payment to most people would also be half the March payment, subject to the same income limits in which an individual’s payment began to phase out after \$75,000.

The CARES Act was credited with keeping the economy from falling off a cliff amid widespread lockdowns this spring, but Republicans controlling the Senate cited debt concerns in pushing against Democratic demands. Republican politicians, starting with President Donald Trump, focused more on reopening the economy and less on taxpayer-financed steps like supplemental jobless benefits.

Progress came after a bipartisan group of pragmatists and moderates devised a \$908 billion plan that built a middle ground position that the top four leaders of Congress — the GOP and Democratic leaders of both the House and Senate — used as the basis for their talks. The lawmakers urged leaders on both sides to back off of hard-line positions.

“We put our heads down and worked around the clock for nearly a month to produce a bipartisan, bicameral bill to address the emergency needs of our country,” the bipartisan group of about a dozen lawmakers said in a statement. “Our consensus bill was the foundation of this final package.”

Republicans were most intent on reviving the Paycheck Protection Program with \$284 billion, which would cover a second round of grants to especially hard-hit businesses. Democrats won set-asides for low-income and minority communities.

Late-breaking decisions would limit \$300 per week bonus jobless benefits — one half the supplemental federal unemployment benefit provided under the CARES Act in March — to 11 weeks instead of 16 weeks as before. The direct \$600 stimulus payment to most people would be half the March payment, subject to the same income limits in which an individual’s payment begins to phase out after \$75,000.

After the announcement, Schumer and Pelosi, D-Calif., announced additional details, including \$25 billion in rental assistance, \$15 billion for theaters and other live venues, \$82 billion for local schools, colleges and universities and \$10 billion for child care.

Lawmakers hold special session as protesters rally at Capitol

By HILLARY BORRUD
and JIM RYAN
The Oregonian

Oregon’s third special legislative session of the year got off to a contentious start Monday morning, with a Republican senator ripping off his mask on the chamber floor and a small group of demonstrators forcing their way into the Capitol.

Gov. Kate Brown called lawmakers back to Salem days before Christmas to extend the state’s eviction moratorium, create a compensation fund for landlords and allocate more money for the state’s COVID-19 response and wildfire recovery work. Lawmakers are also considering proposals to shield schools from coronavirus lawsuits, allow restaurants and bars to sell to-go cocktails and cap the delivery fees they pay to third-party platforms.

State Sen. Dallas Heard, R-Roseburg, did not object to any of the legislative proposals in his speech on the Senate floor as lawmakers held an initial roll call and adopted rules for the special session Monday morning. Instead, Heard focused on the requirement that lawmakers wear masks to prevent the spread of COVID-19 under Oregon Occupational Safety and Health Administration rules enacted in November. Heard also objected to coronavirus restrictions that bar members of the public, with the exception of journalists, from entering the Capitol.

“This is yet another illegitimate session” due to those exclusions, Heard told Senate President Peter Courtney, D-Salem. Quoting from one of the Old Testament’s books of Samuel, Heard told Courtney “adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces” and suggested elected leaders lack authority. “This is (God’s) kingdom, not yours,” Heard said to Courtney.

After chastising Courtney for doing “such great evil to my people” and requiring rather than asking lawmakers to wear face coverings, Heard removed his mask. The Senate president did not respond and Heard left the chamber.

Meanwhile, several dozen demonstrators gathered outside the Capitol as part of a “nonpermitted flash mob” against COVID-19 restrictions. It was promoted by the Vancouver, Washington-based right-wing group Patriot Prayer, whose leader Joey Gibson attended the event.

Demonstrators clashed with law enforcement officers outside the building as the session got underway, according to reports from the scene. Law enforcement officers physically



Dirk VanderHart/Oregon Public Broadcasting

Oregon State Police declared on unlawful assembly at the state Capitol Monday as a group of far-right protesters led by Patriot Prayer attempted to gain access.

pushed demonstrators away from a doorway, and one officer appeared to deploy chemical spray. Freelance writer Laura Jedeed reported that police also fired pepper balls at one point.

The Oregon State Police issued a statement Monday afternoon saying troopers were twice sprayed with “some kind of chemical agent.”

The first incident happened about 8:30 a.m. when protesters accessed an entry room in the Capitol and one sprayed troopers, police said, though that person remains at large. Troopers used “inert pepper balls” while dealing with the protesters, police said.

Later, troopers and Salem Police Department officers pushed the crowd out of the building, when another protests used bear spray against law enforcement, state police said in a news release. Police said Ryan Lyles, 41, was taken into custody and lodged at the Marion County Jail on charges of trespassing and assaulting a police officer. The photo of Lyles released by state police appears to show the same man who has been involved in several far-

right demonstrations on the North Coast.

State police declared an unlawful assembly but said they did not deploy any CS gas.

“The Oregon State Police encourage people to exercise their first amendment rights, but it must be lawfully,” the agency said in a statement. “Please, discontinue the acts of vandalism or destruction of property. If you commit a crime you will be subject to arrest.”

Troopers said later Monday morning that everyone had to leave the Capitol mall grounds and those who remained would be subject to arrest.

Heard addressed the crowd earlier in the morning, saying he has problems with the special session and called on demonstrators to vote out Democrats, according to the Salem Reporter.

A work session on the eviction moratorium and other bills scheduled for 9:30 a.m. was rescheduled to 10:15 a.m., although a spokesperson for House Speaker Tina Kotek said the change was unrelated to the protest.

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