

The Bulletin

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COVID-19 relief package

Biden invites GOP lawmakers to White House talk

BY AAMER MADHANI
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden has agreed to meet a group of 10 Republican senators who have proposed spending about one-third of the \$1.9 trillion he is seeking in coronavirus aid, though congressional Democrats are poised to move ahead without Republican support.

Sunday's invitation to the White House came hours after the lawmakers sent Biden a letter urging him to negotiate rather than try to ram through his relief package solely on Democratic votes. The House and

Senate are on track to vote as soon as this week on a budget resolution, which would lay the groundwork for passing an aid package under rules requiring only a simple majority vote in the closely divided Senate.

The goal is for passage by March, when extra unemployment assistance and other pandemic aid expires. The meeting offered by Biden would amount to the most public involvement for the president in the negotiations for the next round of virus relief. Democratic and Republican lawmakers are far apart in their proposals for assistance.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Sunday that Biden had spoken with the leader of the group, Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine. Though Biden is wanting "a full exchange of views," Psaki reiterated that he remains in favor of moving forward with a far-reaching relief package. A meeting could come in a matter of days.

"With the virus posing a grave threat to the country, and economic conditions grim for so many, the need for action is urgent, and the scale of what must be done is large," Psaki said.

In challenging Biden to fulfill his pledge of unity, the group said in its letter that its counterproposal will include \$160 billion for vaccines, testing, treatment and personal protective equipment and call for more targeted relief than Biden's plan to issue \$1,400 stimulus checks for most Americans.

Winning the support of 10 Republicans would be significant for Biden in the 50-50 Senate where Vice President Kamala Harris is the tie-breaker. If all Democrats were to back an eventual compromise bill, the legislation would reach the 60-vote thresh-

old necessary to overcome potential blocking efforts and pass under regular Senate procedures.

"In the spirit of bipartisanship and unity, we have developed a COVID-19 relief framework that builds on prior COVID assistance laws, all of which passed with bipartisan support," the Republican senators wrote. "Our proposal reflects many of your stated priorities, and with your support, we believe that this plan could be approved quickly by Congress with bipartisan support."

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GETTING HOOKED IN



Ryan Brennecke/The Bulletin



Dan White attempts to hook his heel onto a hold above a large outcropping while climbing a route at Smith Rock State Park on Saturday. White said he traveled from Portland to spend the day exploring and rock climbing at the park with several of his friends.

FALSE CONJECTURE VS. FACTS

How wildfires became ripe areas for conspiracy theories

BY HAILEY BRANSON-POTTS,
JOSEPH SERNA AND ALEJANDRA
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Los Angeles Times

LOS ANGELES — When Lilli Heart fled California's deadliest wildfire in 2018, she was stuck in traffic for two hours outside the town of Paradise with her two cats in a car that was running low on gas.

As the septuagenarian sat behind the wheel on Neal Road — waiting helplessly while the Camp Fire destroyed her two-bedroom house — she saw a huge, dark cloud in the sky. She saw firetrucks. She saw the fear in the eyes of others trying to escape.

"All I saw was a bunch of really, really scared people trying to get the hell out of there," said Heart, 74.

What Heart did not see is this: laser beams.

That, apparently, might come as a surprise to a newly elected Republican congresswoman known for supporting the QAnon conspiracy theory, making anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim comments, and falsely suggesting that school shootings in Newtown, Connecticut, and Parkland, Florida, were staged.

The Camp Fire, which killed 85 people and destroyed more than 13,900 homes, is the latest focus of conspiracy theories spread by U.S. Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, R-Ga., who speculated that the blaze might have been started by a laser beam in space. Greene made the claim in a now-deleted Facebook post that was reported last week by Media Matters for America, a liberal watchdog group.

"It's crazy," Heart said. "Eighty-

five people died in that fire. I lost my whole life of collections, artworks, things that I worked for my whole life. For someone to make light of it like that — it really hurts."

In the meandering November 2018 Facebook post, Greene theorized that a space-based solar generator, used in a clean-energy experiment with the goal of replacing coal and oil, could have beamed the sun's energy back to Earth and started the fire.

"There are all these people," she wrote, "who have said they saw what looked like lasers or blue beams of light causing the fires ... If they are beaming the sun's [sic] energy back to Earth, I'm sure they wouldn't ever miss a transmitter receiving station right?!! ... Could that cause a fire? Hmmm, I don't know."

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Noah Berger/AP file

The remains of residences leveled by the Camp Fire in Paradise, California. The 2018 wildfire, that killed 85 people in Northern California, wiping out the town, has been subject to conspiracy theories online.

TODAY'S WEATHER



Cloud, a little rain
High 49, Low 42
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