

some expanded help in terms of those who have been hit hardest by the pandemic and have lost a job, and the last bipartisan spending agreement reflected that consensus. But now, after finally reaching an agreement on expanded unemployment insurance, one that got people the help they need without creating a disincentive to work, Democrats want to jam through another UI proposal that increases the \$300 per week that we just agreed to in December to \$400 a week. Now, again, that is in the context of the healthcare crisis getting better and the economy getting better and the unemployment numbers going down that we are going to put more into unemployment insurance.

That creates a problem because it will mean if you go up to \$400 a week, then more than half of the workers on unemployment insurance will be earning more on unemployment than they would staying employed. We want to get people back to work. That is what we all should want, at least. So why would you do that? We shouldn't want that. It is going to result in fewer people getting to work as unemployment continues to go down, as the vaccines are more widely available. That is the opposite of what we should want.

At the same time, a new provision in this bill would allow employees who are Federal employees to take 600 hours of taxpayer-funded emergency leave this fiscal year. To put that in perspective, 600 hours is about half of the total number of working hours remaining in this fiscal year.

There are plenty of problems with the way this plan is written. To give you one example, a Federal employee with children in school would be eligible for this leave program as long as the school is offering a remote learning option, even if the kids are going to the classroom every day for in-person learning. Federal employees would also be eligible for this leave if they are feeling unwell, even if they don't have COVID-19, and with no oversight, no doctor's note, and no supervisory approval.

This is far beyond the responsible bipartisan family leave proposal we did include, because we should have, in the Family First Coronavirus Response Act, which offered 80 hours of sick leave, about one-seventh of the time off in this new proposal, and which applies to millions of private and public sector employees, in addition to the Federal employees who are only covered by this new proposal.

When none of us knew exactly how long we would be faced with the COVID-19 crisis, we decided, on a bipartisan basis, that 80 hours was sufficient. But now that we have this new proposal, at seven times that leave with no test necessary, it is at a time when we are actually turning the tide on this virus, and we all acknowledge that. When more of us are being tested and vaccinated, our numbers are going down—thank goodness—and we have a

much better understanding of the dangers of COVID-19. So why does this make sense?

Furthermore, Federal jobs are pretty secure. Why should taxpayers pay for Federal employees to get 600 hours of leave when private sector employees are suffering more job losses than the public sector? It hardly seems like a good use of taxpayer dollars. It is also disappointing in this bill, which all of us are expected to vote on here in the coming days, because the end result is so different than the last five. As I said, the last five times, we put it together in a bipartisan basis.

The process has been frustrating, and I know many colleagues who were part of the group of five Republicans and five Democrats agree with that. We are, in effect, for the sake of expediency and partisan victory, forgetting about thoughtful policy and bipartisan ship.

We have to show that we have enough Republicans to work with Democrats to get this done. I understand that. That is why 10 of us went down to the White House, because along with 50 Democrats, that would be 60, which is the magic number needed. But there is more than 10 Republicans who want to work with Democrats. There have been every time we have taken this up over the past year.

We proposed the \$618 billion counterproposal that shares a lot of common ground with the Biden plan—not \$1.9 trillion but \$618 billion. Again, we take care of all the healthcare response to the virus. This is in the Biden plan. We have a similar approach on stimulus checks: Make it a little more targeted, which everyone, I think, agrees is a good idea.

Again, with regard to schools, we don't waste the money, which we talked about earlier, but we would be focused on getting kids back to school. The main difference in our bill is we take a more targeted approach to address the most urgent healthcare and economic needs.

We heed the advice of prominent Democratic economist Larry Summers and so many others who have now said that the \$1.9 trillion Biden stimulus is not just wasting taxpayer money; it risks overheating an already recovering economy, leading to higher inflation, hurting middle-class families, and threatening long-term growth.

But rather than the counterproposal leading to this productive type of bipartisan negotiations we had last year, this time we have been told Democrats want to go it alone.

We will keep talking to the President's people. We will keep talking to Democrats in Congress, hoping they will follow through on the campaign message and the inaugural promise because that is what we should be doing as a Congress, not just on this issue but so many other issues as well. We shouldn't be going it alone.

Reconciliation has allowed Democrats to take what is essentially a "my

way or the highway" approach to a response package that would be among the most expensive pieces of legislation in our country's history. As a result, dozens of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle are being shut out of providing their input on this bill, and we are going to be left with a partisan bill that fails to meet the most urgent and pressing needs.

In fact, because all of these unrelated spending measures we talked about and others are directed toward traditional Democratic constituencies, I would argue that this bill has not just been my way or the highway, but it has been my way and the highway.

The bottom line is, at the end of the road of this reconciliation process, we will have a bill that underdelivers in many respects and is overpriced, and that is sad to me. It didn't have to be this way. Again, we have done it before five times together, made it inclusive, listened to each other to come up with a bipartisan result. Let's put a stop to this runaway train that is going to add to the deficit unnecessarily and put a damper on the prospects for the bipartisanship promised by this new administration.

Wanting to heal the wounds is something all of us should want. Wanting to work together is something all of us should want. Getting back to an era where we actually sit down, debate things, work them out, and help bring the country together is something all of us should want.

I agree with what President Biden said in his campaign and the inaugural address about the need for unity. Let's do it. Let's not have rhetoric; let's have action.

We can work together to get this done. We won't get there if we continue to operate like this. It hurts not just our new President and his hopes for getting things done; it hurts the country and the ability for us to continue to work together to deal with this crisis and get back to a more normal life.

I yield back my time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The junior Senator from Florida.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST— S. RES. 88

Mr. SCOTT of Florida. Madam President, America is in crisis. Today, the Federal debt sits at a staggering \$27 trillion, and it has grown by more than \$4 trillion in just the last year. Now, Congress is debating whether to spend another \$1.9 trillion, raising our debt to nearly \$30 trillion.

Less than 10 percent of this massive \$1.9 trillion package actually goes directly to COVID relief, and just 1 percent is dedicated to vaccine-related programs. The rest is filled with wasteful liberal priorities.

Speaker PELOSI and Leader SCHUMER, bridges and tunnels have no business being included in a COVID relief bill. It is shameful. Only in Washington can people throw these numbers and ideas

around without a care for what it means for our future. It is dangerous, and it is time to get serious.

Congress has the responsibility to thoroughly review how every single tax dollar is spent by the Federal Government and make sure we are spending wisely. Sadly, this is rare behavior in Washington. Congress spends with reckless abandon and rarely considers how today's foolishness will impact our children and grandchildren, and we are seeing President Biden and Senate Democrats continue this dangerous behavior. For them, the Obama-era thinking of "Never let a crisis go to waste" is alive and well.

Estimates show that there is roughly \$1 trillion in enacted but unspent COVID-19 stimulus funding. Last month, I wrote to President Biden's Acting Director for the Office of Management and Budget requesting any documents related to enacted but currently unspent COVID-19 stimulus funding. The response: None. Total silence.

Here is what that means: The Senate has no idea how States are spending their allocated funds, and we don't know what the actual needs are. It would be completely irresponsible and an abdication of our duty as stewards of American tax dollars if the Senate continues to approve further spending without more information.

That is why my colleagues and I are introducing a resolution calling on President Biden to inform the Senate of how much unspent funds are left over from the previous COVID spending bills. We want to be very clear. This resolution only asks for information from the President that will help the Senate make an informed decision.

I am proud to be joined today by Senator LANKFORD and Senator ERNST to ask for transparency.

It is pretty simple. Ever since the pandemic started, I have wanted the Federal Government to step in and help those who are hurting and have lost their jobs. I will completely agree that we need to do more to help families and small businesses that continue to suffer from the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic. Relief is needed, but it has to be targeted. We have to consider our debt and do only what is necessary for those in need.

I grew up in public housing and watched my parents struggle to find work and make ends meet. I saw my dad's car get repossessed twice. I never want a family to go through what mine did growing up. But before another dollar is spent, especially dollars going to liberal initiatives that have nothing to do with COVID relief, there needs to be a full and clear accounting of all enacted but unspent funding. The decisions we make today have serious impacts on our children and grandchildren.

But before I continue, I yield to my colleagues from Iowa and Oklahoma and thank them for their effort.

I now yield to Senator ERNST.

Ms. ERNST. Thank you to the Senator from Florida as well and for sharing his personal story and why it is so important that we have transparency on bills like this COVID package.

Over the course of the pandemic, Congress has worked together—Republicans and Democrats—to pass five overwhelmingly bipartisan bills providing COVID-19 relief to the American people, and I think we would all agree that that relief was much needed.

Now, in March, we passed the largest stimulus package in American history. And just a few months ago, we passed the second largest. But what the Democrats aren't telling you is that much of the \$900 billion we passed in the most recent relief package, and even some of the CARES Act money, has yet to be spent. And, frankly, folks, we don't even know exactly who has spent what money Congress has doled out over the last year.

I have long said, the American taxpayer deserves to know where and how their money is being spent. Bottom line, we need transparency and to know what has and has not been spent so far.

This commonsense effort will help us get this information. Until we have those details, we should not continue throwing money to Washington bureaucrats, and we certainly should not support this partisan \$1.9 trillion package that includes many items that are completely unrelated to COVID-19.

I agree with my colleagues that there is more that we can do to help expedite the vaccine distribution and promote access to childcare so our parents can return to work. But, folks, this is not Monopoly money. This is real money.

We have a moral obligation to our future generations to spend responsibly. Iowans and all Americans deserve transparency before we add trillions of dollars to their tab.

With that, I will yield to the Senator from Oklahoma.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The junior Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. LANKFORD. Madam President, Senator SCOTT, Senator ERNST, and I are not trying to ask for something that the American people aren't already asking for as well and, quite frankly, the Senate and this White House haven't already said that they wanted to be able to do: basic transparency, efficient spending.

It is Wednesday afternoon right now. We are about to take up a bill for, we think, \$1.9 trillion. And I say "we think" because none of us has seen the text of this bill yet, not one of us on either side of the aisle. And the debate was supposed to begin on it today, but none of us has seen the text for this.

Supposedly, we are supposed to start voting on it tomorrow night, though no one has seen the text of the bill yet. In addition to that, last year, this Congress, on a bipartisan basis, passed five COVID relief bills totaling over \$4 trillion. Every dollar of that \$4 trillion was borrowed, every dollar. None of that was budgeted. But there was bi-

partisan agreement as we walked through the process to determine that this is an emergency; this is a global pandemic. To help stabilize our economy from going into free fall, we have to do some very difficult things. But in the middle of all of that, we also said we don't need to borrow a dollar more than what we need to borrow. Let's borrow what we need to but not more than we need to.

Interestingly enough, of the five bills and \$4 trillion that was allocated for COVID last year, only \$3 trillion of that \$4 trillion has actually been spent yet. We still have over \$1 trillion unspent of the money from last year.

But before that last trillion dollars, which imagine just how big that really is—to give you an example, every single Agency in the Federal Government, the total budget for a year, is \$1 trillion. So this "little \$1 trillion" that is left would cover the total budget for every Agency in the Federal Government for all of next year.

With this \$1 trillion that is still unspent, the Biden administration and my Democratic colleagues are saying: We want an additional \$2 trillion. Basically, near the end of the pandemic, they want a bill as large as what we had the very first month of the pandemic a year ago, when we knew we were in economic free fall.

All we are asking are a couple of things: One is, hey, can we read the bill? No. 2, can we get real numbers of what is unspent and anything that is unspent that we can reallocate for something in the future? Let me give you an example. The best I can tell, we have about \$6 billion still left in the vaccine line item left over from last year—\$6 billion just for vaccine, and that is vaccine purchases. There is another \$17 billion left over just for all the distribution process for vaccines. That is a lot of money.

Just yesterday, President Biden announced we will have all the vaccines available for every adult in America by the end of May. It is paid for, set aside, ready to go. Yet this bill that I understand is coming tomorrow—maybe later today—has tens of billions of dollars more in vaccine money. Why are there tens of billions of dollars more in vaccine money, when just yesterday the President announced we have all the purchases done all the way through toward the end of May to vaccinate every adult in America? And there are billions of dollars still left over in the two vaccine accounts even after that. Why are we asking for tens of billions of dollars more? Where is that money going? That shouldn't be an unreasonable question. That should be a question everybody should ask. Why are we asking for tens of billions of dollars more in vaccine money when we have already purchased everything related to vaccines? Is this foreign aid vaccines? We don't know.

There is \$170 billion being requested for education expenses. All of us want to take care of education, but \$170 billion is twice as much as what the

American people spend on education in a year. The total education budget is \$67 billion for the entire year for all of the Federal education budget—\$67 billion. This is now very close to three times what the annual budget is for all of spending just for COVID. And, by the way, still unspent in the education amount from last year's budget, we understand, is about \$68 billion. So there is still \$68 billion unallocated in education entities that hasn't even been touched yet.

Hey, listen, before everybody jumps up and says, you Republicans are just being a blockade, can we just ask a question? How much money is unspent, and what is the money going toward that we are asking for? That shouldn't be an unreasonable question. That should be a reasonable question. We are not trying to be obstructionists; we are just trying to get information.

And, quite frankly, when our team calls over to the White House and says: Can you give us the details of what is unspent in this amount—I know it is early in their Presidency, and they are still getting organized, but most of the time their answer is: We will get back to you, and they never do.

We need to know what is still left over of this \$1 trillion that has already been allocated before we allocate another \$2 trillion, knowing every single dollar of that is borrowed from China or somewhere else.

This is a real issue. We should resolve this before we move to spending another \$2 trillion. And I thank very much Senator SCOTT for his leadership in this area and asking some very basic questions.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The junior Senator from Florida.

Mr. SCOTT of Florida. Madam President, I thank Senator LANKFORD and Senator ERNST.

Passing this resolution will show the American people that Congress can be both responsive to the needs of American families and small businesses hurt by this pandemic while also remaining fully accountable for the proper stewardship of tax dollars.

This is about basic transparency and getting the facts. If this resolution passes and the administration shares the information I have been requesting, it will go a long way in helping Congress craft a targeted bill that directly addresses the real needs in our Nation today.

I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the consideration of S. Res. 88, submitted earlier today. I further ask that the resolution be agreed to, the preamble be agreed to, and that the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. PETERS. Madam President, I reserve the right to object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

Mr. PETERS. Madam President, I certainly appreciate the Senator from Florida's interest in oversight of the coronavirus emergency relief funds. This funding has been and continues to be critical to the American people throughout the pandemic.

I also appreciate the Senator's support for the creation of the Pandemic Response Accountability Committee when he voted for the CARES Act. This was a provision that I authored to ensure that we would have strong oversight of coronavirus relief dollars.

I agree wholeheartedly that we must be faithful stewards of taxpayer money. That is why the CARES Act directed the Government Accountability Office, our congressional watchdog, to oversee coronavirus spending. We are fortunate to receive consistent, detailed reporting and recommendations on these issues. The Senator's resolution, however, will not strengthen these oversight mechanisms, nor will it deliver any form of relief to families who are hurting and small businesses that are struggling.

If the Senator from Florida wants an update on the current status of funding from previous coronavirus relief bills, I am happy to provide one to him.

Let's first look at the first coronavirus relief measures, all of which were passed in March and April of last year. To date, approximately 93 percent of those funds have been obligated and 88 percent have been outlaid. After accounting for benefits that are, by design, continuing to be paid out over time, there is less than \$100 billion of uncommitted funds left, and approximately half of that is in the Provider Relief Fund for struggling medical providers, whose needs continue to be extremely high.

For the legislation signed into law on December 27, 2020, more than half of this funding has already been committed, but if we set aside expanded unemployment benefits, which expire next month; small business relief; and the tax credit portion of the economic impact payments, which will be disbursed over time, less than 12 percent of the funding from December remains unobligated.

We know the status of funds from past COVID relief bills. This information is not being kept secret in any way. In addition to reports from the Pandemic Response Accountability Committee and the Government Accountability Office, we have a monthly SF 133 report from the Office of Management and Budget.

Coronavirus-related spending is also publicly tracked—publicly tracked—on both USASpending.gov and on the website of the Pandemic Response Accountability Committee.

We don't need more reports right now; we need action. We have been fighting a public health and economic crisis, neither of which will magically disappear without additional Federal action. We can't wait until more small businesses close or hospitals run into

the red. We know how badly Americans are hurting, and they are hurting right now.

We are a full year into this pandemic that has taken the lives of over 515,000 Americans. And this pandemic is not over. It is continuing to ravage communities all across our Nation.

Let's look at where we are right now. Upwards of 2,000 Americans are dying each and every day. Daily cases are at the same levels we saw during the last surge in July, with over 50,000 Americans testing positive for COVID-19 every day. We are also facing the new threat of emerging variants like the UK and South African strains, which unfortunately could lead to even more cases.

The economic toll continues to go on. Millions of Americans remain out of work. In January, the unemployment rate was nearly double that of prepandemic levels, and unemployment claims are still more than double prepandemic levels. We all have friends, family members, and neighbors who are hurting right now. Small businesses have had to slash their hours, cutting into their own bottom line and employees' paychecks.

We need to help struggling families by providing rental assistance, stimulus checks, and unemployment benefits. We need to help kids by supporting our schools so we can get back to in-person learning. We need to invest in the public health infrastructure necessary to combat this virus by increasing testing capacity, implementing vaccine education campaigns, and tracking and containing the new COVID variants that we see springing up.

We are starting to see a glimpse of light at the end of this very long—far too long—tunnel, but we must keep moving forward. The American Rescue Plan will finally allow us to control the virus, improve the lives of all Americans, and get us out of this crisis.

We should not be wasting time on partisan resolutions that will neither deliver relief nor meaningfully improve oversight of COVID relief efforts. We must come together and provide the relief that families and small businesses all across our country so desperately need.

Madam President, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The junior Senator from Florida.

Mr. SCOTT of Florida. Madam President, I am extremely disappointed in my colleague's decision to block this resolution. My colleagues and I wouldn't be doing this resolution if we were receiving the information that my colleague said we were receiving.

This has nothing to do with whether Senate Republicans want to provide relief. We want to provide relief. We want to do it in a targeted manner, and we want to make sure that we don't waste taxpayer dollars.

This objection just blocked the Senate from requesting basic information

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.