

aren't receiving these same benefits. This is clearly cherry-picking to benefit Federal employees, to pay them not to work.

I respect the work that Federal employees do. I respect the work that all government employees do. But to give them preferential treatment in the midst of this pandemic by paying them not to work and using tax dollars from other States and other places that don't enjoy that benefit is simply grossly unfair.

Over the last year, countless numbers of parents have balanced the impossible: work and remote learning for their children. It has been hard. I understand that. Many parents turned their kitchen tables into makeshift offices and classroom spaces until their children were able to physically return to school. Today, less than 7 percent of the school districts in Texas are fully remote. Seven percent are fully remote, and two-thirds are fully in-person in my State. They have found a way to safely return to the classroom. There is no reason why the Texans who have made that tough juggling act, working and learning remotely, should now have to pay Federal employees who have not had to make that tough choice.

It is simply false advertising to call this a COVID-19 relief bill. It is deceptive and outrageously so. Only \$160 billion dollars—8 percent of the total cost—is directly related to combating COVID-19. Eight percent. The rest of the bill, as I have tried to point out, is a variety of—it is a grab bag, really, of partisan priorities, wasteful spending, and counterproductive policy.

What is worse, this restructuring, according to Mr. CLYBURN's language, to fit the vision of the Democratic Party will cost taxpayers nearly \$2 trillion. That is on top of the \$4 trillion we already spent last year. Two trillion more.

Well, somebody is going to have to pay that money back, and I fear it will not be us because we will be long gone. It will be our children and grandchildren, and at this rate of reckless spending, our great-grandchildren will have to be the ones to pay the money back.

This bill is not the answer to the real challenges that face our country posed by the pandemic. We have shown our willingness to work together in a bipartisan way to enthusiastically support the need to provide real relief both from the public health consequences and the economic fallout associated with the virus, but this bill doesn't even attempt to do that.

Fortunately, as a result of the work we did last year, including last December—and by the way, only about 20 percent of the money that we appropriated just a few weeks ago—actually, a couple of months ago in December—has actually been spent. Only about 20 percent has been spent, and here we are being asked to appropriate \$1.9 trillion more.

But the good news is, the money we spent last year is having real results. The money we invested in treatments and research and development of vaccines and now the distribution of vaccines—it is actually making a real difference. We are vaccinating roughly 3 million people a day in America. More than 70 million people have had shots in arms, and we are doing our best to try to get it in people's arms as fast as we safely can. President Biden said we will get that job done by the end of May. That is wonderful news.

The other wonderful news is that unemployment rates are going down and State revenue is going back up. School districts across the country have safely resumed in-person learning. One in five adults in America has now received a dose of the vaccine, and a third vaccine has now been approved, so that number will climb faster and faster and faster.

Every day we are moving closer to the light at the end of the tunnel, and now is not the time to squander the good will and trust that the American people have had in us to be good stewards of the public health and our economy by engaging in this sort of embarrassing partisan exercise.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. CASEY. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. BALDWIN). Without objection, it is so ordered.

The senior Senator from Pennsylvania.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. CASEY. Madam President, I wanted to speak in particular terms about the American Rescue Plan and in particular about the provision of home- and community-based services. We know that when we speak of these kinds of services, we are talking about services that benefit seniors across the country as well as Americans with disabilities. We are also concerned as well for the heroic frontline workers who provide those services, most of whom—virtually all of whom have been underpaid and, frankly, underappreciated for far too long.

Let me start with the provision of these home- and community-based services in terms of the people who are benefiting from these services. Right now, about 4 million Americans receive home care and home health services in their own homes or apartments. Receiving these services at home reduces the likelihood that that older American will be infected by the virus.

Serving and supporting older adults and people with disabilities reduces pressure on nursing homes and other congregate settings. We know that these kind of services, the home- and

community-based services, make sure that seniors and people with disabilities have a chance to continue to live where they want to live, as opposed to living in a congregate setting. In many cases, that means they will have more contact with their families, reducing the loneliness and social isolation that can be damaging to their mental health. So this American Rescue Plan includes temporary Federal funding to States to increase Medicaid home- and community-based services.

If the bill were to pass, an additional \$9.3 billion would be made available to States to ensure that workers who provide these services have the protection and resources they need to provide the care and to provide the services.

More than 200 organizations from around the country wrote to Congress in support of these new dollars. For months, SEIU, one of the great unions in America representing workers—healthcare workers; the disability community, as well; advocates for older adults like AARP and others—have rallied around the need for this funding.

This funding can be used to increase wages for direct-service providers, the workers. It can be used to secure additional personal protective equipment and testing supplies for workers and those that they support. Home- and community-based funds can also be used to help people transition from congregate settings back to their homes. It can also be used to provide services for the 800,000 Americans waiting for this kind of help.

For example, Ira Hall from Westmoreland County, PA, just right in the southwestern corner of our State, next to Pittsburgh, in that county, Ira will continue to receive services, and he will receive that service from his direct service worker, Ray Williams. I was able to visit both of these individuals last May during a virtual home visit.

Home- and community-based services make it possible for Ira, who has a developmental disability, to live in his own apartment. Ray, who is his direct service worker, helps Ira plan his day and helps him throughout his workday and helps him find the resources he needs to meet his goals.

During the pandemic, Ray's support made it possible for Ira to remain in his home and to be safe from contracting the virus. The services Ray provides also helps Ira maintain his physical and mental health. We know that the American Rescue Plan makes it possible for services like those Ira receives and Ray provides. It will also mean the agencies providing these services will continue to operate and provide essential home- and community-based services throughout the public health crisis.

Passage of the bill would be a down payment on securing strong and comprehensive home- and community-based services infrastructure, but it is only a down payment. This pandemic has revealed a fragile home care and home health system. These funds

should be the first step in creating home- and community-based services infrastructure that can serve seniors and all people with disabilities who want to live in their own homes and remain in their communities with their families, friends, and neighbors.

With the passage of this American Rescue Plan, we will be able to address the immediate pandemic needs of older adults, as well as people with disabilities. Let's work to ensure this first step starts to create the path to a robust, comprehensive home care and home health network in every State for every senior and every American with a disability.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The junior Senator from Ohio.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. PORTMAN. Madam President, I worked with my colleague from Pennsylvania on some of these home care options, and I think it is a very positive thing. In fact, it saves a lot of cost for the system, but the question is, What is it doing in a COVID relief bill?

You know, I just have to say, having been involved in a bipartisan way on five different COVID relief packages over the last year, I am just so discouraged that we can't sit down, Republicans and Democrats alike, and work out a targeted, focused bill on COVID, and, by the way, then move on to other things, including healthcare reform, including issues that traditionally have also been bipartisan, like infrastructure and broadband expansion, like retirement security or dealing with China and supply chain issues.

But this is not the way to start. We are looking at a \$1.9 trillion package, the second largest ever written by Congress. The first one went through last year. And there was no input—virtually no input—from anybody on our side of the aisle because the administration decided they didn't want it. They wanted to jam this thing through without our participation. And it is too bad, because they will end up with a product that is not going to be as focused and targeted, but, also, it is just getting off on the wrong foot and making it more difficult for us to figure out how to come together on other issues.

It is really the opposite. This process is really the opposite of what President Biden talked about. He talked about it in his campaign. I mean, he won a campaign, including in his primary, saying he wanted to work across the aisle; he wanted to change the tone in Washington. That was pretty brave of him to say, really.

And, then, in his inaugural address, he did the same thing; didn't he? He talked about the need for unity. He talked about wanting to get people together and to work with Democrats and Republicans alike and kind of get back to that. This is exactly the opposite of that. I just don't get it. I have to tell you, I am mystified why they want to start off this way.

I was one of the 10 Republicans who went down to the White House to meet with President Biden about this a few weeks ago, and we offered our own proposal and said we would like to work with you and negotiate with you. And, you know, there has been no interest, to be honest, and I wish it weren't the case.

And \$4 trillion has already been allocated to the COVID-19 issue, and it was needed. It is a crisis. It still is. It is not over yet, although things are getting a lot better, both in terms of the healthcare crisis and in terms of the economy. But we did that, again, five different times—over \$4 trillion, five different times in a bipartisan way.

So we know we can do it. It is hard for us to do it on other issues—let's face it—like taxes or even healthcare, but it is not with regard to COVID-19. At least it hasn't been until now.

The most recent \$900 billion COVID relief package passed at the end of December by a 92 to 6 vote—92 to 6. I came out to the floor to give speeches on this Senate floor over 20 times in the months prior to that legislation finally being passed, urging Congress to come out of our partisan corners, Democrats and Republicans alike, and to come up with a COVID relief package, because I saw so much middle ground. And we found it by the end of December. I was part of a group of five Democrats and five Republicans who sat down over a month-long period or so. We actually wrote a bill. The “908 Coalition,” we called ourselves because we wrote a bill for \$900 billion that was the basis for that \$900 billion legislation that eventually passed. So I have been there. I have done it. We have done it. We can do it. Yet we are looking here at an entirely different process and, unfortunately, a product that is not targeted, not focused.

It is interesting to note that of the \$900 billion that we appropriated just a couple of months ago, at the end of the year, more than half of that, we are told, has not been spent yet. So while we are starting a \$1.9 trillion new spending project, about half of what we just did has yet to be spent. So how do we know how much is needed? It is very hard to know.

I will say that it is troubling to me that this bill is loaded up with provisions that don't relate to addressing the COVID-19 pandemic, because we should be targeted and focused like a laser on that issue and not on other things. In fact, when you look at the healthcare part of this, most people would think: OK, what would you do with a COVID-19 bill? You would focus on the coronavirus. You would focus on the testing and the tracing. You would focus on the vaccine development and distribution. You would focus on the healthcare side, including healthcare providers.

Unfortunately, that is a very small part of the funding of this bill. It is \$160 billion out of \$1.9 trillion, so less than 10 percent of the bill is focused on

that. And, by the way, the alternative I mentioned that we offered to President Biden—\$160 billion. We totally believe in that part of the bill, and that we should put all of that in there, particularly with regard to the vaccines.

So it is frustrating because not only is the process not what we have done in the past and is best for this country, but also the substance of this bill is just not targeted on COVID-19. How do I tell hard-working families in my State of Ohio that there is a provision in the bill that asks Medicare to spend more money in New Jersey, Delaware, and Rhode Island but not in Ohio and other States? How do I explain that we need to set aside hundreds of millions of dollars that are in this bill in additional Federal funds for the arts? We can have that debate on the arts, but it has nothing to do with COVID-19. We have the highest deficit, as a share of GDP, since World War II—the highest debt as a share of GDP. You know, I don't think we should be spending that kind of money on things that don't relate to COVID-19.

Beyond these kinds of unrelated provisions, there are also proposals in this stimulus that are directed at important issues, but, based on what is needed to respond to the current challenges, are simply unnecessary and add up to more wasteful spending.

For example, we reached a point in this pandemic where the CDC, or the Centers for Disease Control, has said that schools can start to open safely with the right measures in place—thank goodness. We want to get our kids back to school. That should be a cause for celebration. But the plan here, the \$1.9 trillion, doesn't reflect those findings. Last year, we appropriated \$113 billion for schools to help navigate the pandemic, but, as of now, of that \$113 billion, only \$15 billion has been spent. So, roughly, \$100 billion is left over from last year with regard to schools.

If we are already opening classes safely with that amount, why does this \$1.9 trillion plan instead call for an additional investment of \$130 billion in our schools, but especially when we are told that most of that \$130 billion will not be spent in this calendar year? Nobody thinks that next year, at this time, we are going to have the crisis we have now, and yet the \$130 billion of new money will not be spent until the end of 2028.

By the way, the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimates that about half of the funds in the entire proposal won't even be spent in this calendar year. That is their analysis—objective, nonpartisan. No one expects, again, that we will be in this crisis at that time. So it just doesn't seem to make sense to me.

There are other provisions in this bill that seem to actually take solutions we have come up with in the past COVID-19 package and make them worse. Unemployment insurance is a good example. Republicans and Democrats alike believe there needs to be