

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT **PANDEMIC AID**

THIS IS AN EXCERPT OF A PRO ANALYSIS ORIGINALLY WRITTEN BY BY CAITLIN EMMA AND CRISTINA RIVERO

HOW WE GOT HERE

Congress passed four separate relief packages totaling roughly \$3 trillion at the onset of the pandemic. Bipartisan negotiations on another tranche of aid then stalled for eight months. Democrats pushed for another massive bill to bolster vaccine distribution, bail out state and local budgets and alleviate lingering unemployment, while Republicans stressed the need for more targeted legislation.

In December, Congress passed a fifth \$900 billion bipartisan package, which was coupled with \$1.4 trillion in annual spending. In January, Democrats won two Senate runoff races in Georgia, giving them a narrow majority in the upper chamber. With control of both chambers of Congress and the White House, Democrats can now use reconciliation to realize Biden's pandemic aid proposal and other long-held priorities.

PREVIOUS COVID RELIEF**\$170B**

for K-12 schools and \$40B for higher education.

\$39B

for the Child Care and Development Block Grant program.

\$4.5B

for the Low Income Home Energy-Assistance Program.

WHAT'S NEXT

Every provision in a reconciliation bill must clear the so-called Byrd Rule, which limits items to those that have a significant effect on federal spending, revenues or the debt. In the Senate, an official adviser known as the parliamentarian will decide whether all of the pieces of Biden's plan comply with the rules.

Perhaps the biggest question is a \$15 minimum wage hike — a priority for the president and progressives. Democratic leaders are planning to include that wage boost in Biden's coronavirus package and see how the parliamentarian rules, although the proposal is already running into resistance from some moderate Senate Democrats.

Once the reconciliation package is finalized, both chambers can take it up under expedited procedures and send it to the president's desk. Separately, Democrats may later use reconciliation to force major climate and infrastructure investments.

POWER PLAYERS

Nancy Pelosi
House Speaker

Chuck Schumer
Senate Majority Leader

Elizabeth MacDonough
Senate Parliamentarian

Bernie Sanders
Senate Budget Chair

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