

CONGRESS

Senate passes \$484 billion coronavirus deal after weeks of deadlock

The legislation delivers funding to small businesses, hospitals and for testing.

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After two weeks of stalemate and days of frenetic negotiations, the Senate approved a nearly \$500 billion coronavirus aid bill on Tuesday afternoon with the House set for passage later this week. The agreement centers around providing \$380 billion for small businesses and also includes \$75 billion for hospitals and \$25 billion for disease testing.

It comes after a brutal conflict between party leaders over how to pass a massive bill with the Senate in recess. A pair of conservative Republican senators, Mike Lee of Utah and Rand Paul of Kentucky, railed against the process on Tuesday afternoon but allowed the bill to go through without objecting.



The House is expected to take up and pass the legislation on Thursday with overwhelming bipartisan support, per senior House aides.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) announced the accord just an hour before the Senate tried to pass the agreement and rapped Democrats for blocking a previous proposal to give money to small businesses.

"I am just sorry that it took my colleagues in Democratic leadership 12 days to accept the inevitable," McConnell said. "The American people are counting on Congress to put aside reflexive partisanship and work across the aisle to help our nation through this pandemic."

Schumer responded that the legislation "is significantly better and broader" than McConnell's bill by catering to businesses without access to large financial institutions and providing more health care money than Republicans initially sought.

"Leader McConnell tried to steamroll us," Schumer said in a press conference after the vote. He and other Democrats have accused McConnell of trying to unilaterally bypass them on the small business legislation while ignoring their demands.

The legislation totals \$484 billion and delivers funding to small businesses, hospitals, and for testing. The quick Senate passage on Tuesday comes after Democrats and the Trump administration struggled to clinch the agreement over the weekend and failed to deliver it during Monday's Senate session.

Passage of the massive bill was in doubt until just minutes before the Senate came in at 4 p.m. as last-minute haggling continued. Paul, who has recovered after contracting coronavirus, even hinted that he could block the bill, but would not do so due to the difficulty of getting senators back to Washington to hold a roll call vote. He then said instead of spending money to fight coronavirus the government should open back up the economy.

But President Donald Trump signaled he'd sign the legislation into law, tweeting Tuesday that he's urging lawmaker to pass the bill "with additional funding for PPP, Hospitals, and Testing."



CORONAVIRUS

Rand Paul and Mike Lee rip Senate for passing coronavirus aid

BY MARIANNE LEVINE

Still, McConnell said afterward the Senate probably would not attempt to clear another such bill by unanimous consent. "I will predict that we will not try to pass another rescue package by consent. My view is we ought to bring everybody back, have full participation," he said. Congress is not due back in Washington until May 4 at the earliest.

The legislation includes \$321 billion for the depleted Paycheck Protection Program, of which \$60 billion is set aside for underbanked businesses, a priority for Democrats. The deal also includes \$60 billion in loans and grants for economic disaster assistance, \$75 billion for hospitals and \$25 billion for coronavirus testing. Of that testing money, \$11 billion will go to states and some will also go to the federal government.

Two weeks ago, Senate Democrats blocked the Senate GOP's initial offer of \$250 billion for small businesses, demanding a broader package of aid that included millions of dollars for hospitals and states. That conflict had resulted in a standoff between Democrats and Republicans, with Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin moving to arbitrate the impasse.

The Paycheck Protection Program ran out of its initial \$349 billion round of funding last week. Since then, Republicans have hammered Democrats for blocking efforts to replenish the small business fund.

"Democratic leaders blocked the money and spent days trying to negotiate extraneous issues that were never on the table. I am grateful our colleagues have walked away from those demands and will finally let Congress act," McConnell said.

Democrats counter that the bill expected to pass Congress this week contains much of what they demanded two weeks ago, pinning the delay on Republicans.

"When you look at the package that's going to be passed, it's almost exactly like the one we asked for two weeks ago," House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-Md.) told reporters on a press call Tuesday. "We're ending up with a bill we could've passed 12 days ago."

Yet Republicans fended off money for state and local governments that Democrats wanted and also got more for small businesses than previously requested. Democrats, meanwhile, were able to deliver on more money for hospitals and testing that they'd requested.

Democrats admitted defeat on their demands for \$150 billion for states and local governments after McConnell and Mnuchin took a hard line against including that money. Schumer said he was "sorely disappointed" new food aid and more money requested by governors was not included in the package.

The Senate minority leader, along with Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) continued negotiating with Meadows and Mnuchin until early Tuesday.

The House, which is set to vote Thursday on the relief measure, will not be able to pass the legislation unanimously and lawmakers have been instructed to prepare to return to the Capitol this week. Hoyer said members were not being forced to come back but he expected more than enough lawmakers to establish a quorum — 216 members — and clear the package via a roll call vote.

"We are asking every member to return who can return," Hoyer told reporters during his weekly press call on Tuesday. "There are some members who are particularly vulnerable to either themselves because of some preexisting condition or they are caring for relatives ... so we're not ordering members to come back."

CORONAVIRUS: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

The Senate passed a bipartisan deal on coronavirus aid. [Read the text of the nearly \\$500 billion bill.](#)

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