

Niagara USA Chamber outlines new COVID-19 relief bill

Mixed reactions to new economic stimulus measure

The Niagara USA Chamber has broken down details of a new coronavirus relief bill approved this week by Congress:

- ✓ The final COVID relief package is approximately \$900 billion
 - ✓ It extends the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) and adds deductibility for PPP expenses
 - ✓ Gives businesses experiencing severe revenue reductions an opportunity to apply for a second draw PPP loan
 - ✓ Includes 501(c)(6) organizations such as chambers of commerce, but excludes unions from eligibility
 - ✓ \$15 billion in funding for entertainment venues, movie theaters and museums that are experiencing significant revenue loss
 - ✓ Codifies federal rules that ensure churches and faith-based organizations are eligible for PPP loans
- Other provisions in the bill include:
- ✓ \$20 billion for purchase of vaccines that will make them available at no charge
 - ✓ \$8 billion for vaccine distribution
 - ✓ \$20 billion to assist states with testing
 - ✓ \$20 billion distribution from existing provider relief fund
 - ✓ Ends CARES Act emergency powers for the Federal Reserve
 - ✓ Stimulus checks – \$600 for both adults and dependents
 - ✓ Temporarily extends a number of unemployment programs created by CARES Act that expire Dec. 31, 2020
 - ✓ Provides unemployed individuals an additional \$300 per week for 10 weeks from Dec. 26, 2020, through March 14, 2021
 - ✓ Extends and phases-out PUA, which is a temporary federal program covering self-employed and

gig workers, to March 14 through April 5, 2021

- ✓ \$10 billion for grants to child care centers to help providers safely reopen
- ✓ \$4 billion for substance abuse – significant progress made over past several years on opioid addiction has been reversed because of impact of COVID-19 lockdowns
- ✓ \$82 billion in funding for schools and universities to assist with reopening for in-person learning that also includes \$2.75 billion in designated funds for private K through 12 education
- ✓ \$25 billion in temporary and targeted rental assistance for individuals who lost their source of income during the pandemic
- ✓ Extends the eviction moratorium until Jan. 31, 2021
- ✓ \$7 billion in broadband funding
- ✓ Increases SNAP benefits by 15% for six months, but does not expand eligibility, and requires the secretary to issue a report on redemption rate and unexpended balances
- ✓ Provides funding for the Commodity Supplemental Food Program, a program that serves more than 700,000 older Americans monthly
- ✓ \$13 billion to support farmers and the agriculture sector
- ✓ Enhances assistance under the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP) to support specialty crop, non-specialty crop, livestock, dairy and poultry producers
- ✓ Gives discretionary authority to the secretary to support producers of biofuels, producers of organics or value-added products, and timber harvesting and hauling businesses
- ✓ Additional funding is directed to programs that support local producers and new and beginning farmers, dairy producers, dairy processors via reimbursement for

donated dairy products, fisheries, textile mills, agricultural research, small- and medium-size meat processors, and to state departments of agriculture for farm stress programs

Mixed Reactions

Congressman Brian Higgins, D-NY-26, said, “The health and lives of the American people are at stake. From education to employment, the pandemic has had a devastating effect on all aspects of society. It is the role of the federal government to respond to a national emergency, and while imperfect, this bill addresses several of the urgent needs people are facing.”

Congressman Chris Jacobs, R-NY-27, said, “After months of deliberation, countless calls for targeted aid from my Republican colleagues and me, and hours of hard work, we have finally passed a bipartisan COVID-19 relief package through the House of Representatives. This relief has been long overdue, and I am disappointed in the last-minute, rushed process that got us here. But I am glad this necessary aid is finally making its way to the people of NY-27.”

City of Niagara Falls Mayor Robert Restaino said called the relief package “incomplete.”

“At long last, Congress has negotiated an economic relief package, nearly six months after the House version was passed, and it terribly misses the mark,” he said. “While there is no doubt that the families, businesses, schools and other programs that made it into the relief package are all in need of help, it is impossible to explain why local governments were left out – except if you recognize that it was a callous political act.”

“As businesses were impacted by the pandemic, resulting in many being forced to close – perhaps permanently – leading to layoffs of workers and families suffering to make ends meet, local governments continued to provide essential services: public safety, public works and sanitation, to name a few. Local governments were forced to terminate programs for youth and seniors as

a result of falling revenues due to the shutdowns caused by the pandemic. Public employees continued as essential workers to keep city-systems working all while suffering the same risks as all front-line workers.

“Local governments provided frontline support to their residents and responded to federal and state directives in the management of the health crisis, and to be forgotten as an essential institution in this relief package is outrageous and short-sighted. As cities struggle to make their way out of the pandemic, more cuts to personnel and reductions in services become the only method Congress has given us to avoid tax increases to maintain services – increases that will further impact the working families Congress claims to care about.”

“While we know that there are those in Congress who understand the plight of local governments, it is unfortunate that the voice for local government was ignored. It is not enough to suggest that this is just ‘a beginning’ or a ‘first installment,’ and ‘The new administration and Congress know they need to do more.’ These promises hold out as much hope as the comments over the last six months that ‘something has to get done.’ Ultimately, local economies will continue to suffer if local governments continue to be ignored.”

Chip Rogers, president and CEO of the American Hotel & Lodging Association, said, “On behalf of the hotel industry, we applaud the House and Senate leadership, along with the administration, for reaching a bipartisan compromise on this COVID economic relief package. This short-term relief package is a vital step toward helping the hotel industry survive this crisis. The proposed measure provides temporary relief over the next few months and will help thousands of hotels stay open and retain employees.”

“For months, the hotel industry has been imploring lawmakers to help the people and industries that have been most affected by this

crisis. After more than 250,000 individual grassroots actions taken by AHLA members, we are pleased to finally see a long-overdue agreement.

“The legislation contains many of the provisions AHLA has advocated for, including a second round of Paycheck Protection Program loans, increasing the size of PPP loans to 3.5 times payroll, and making PPP loan expenses tax-deductible. This will provide a critical lifeline for hotels and other businesses that have been decimated by the pandemic. Other hotel industry priorities include a one-year extension for troubled debt restructuring (TDR) relief so that banks can continue working with borrowers to gain additional forbearance and debt relief, business meal deductibility through 2022, and expanded employee retention tax credit.”

Mark Parkinson, president and CEO of the American Health Care Association and National Center for Assisted Living, said, “While we appreciate the difficulty in reaching a bipartisan compromise, we are disappointed that Congress could not strike a deal that recognizes the dire situation our long-term-care residents and staff are facing right now. Due to soaring community spread, nursing homes are experiencing a record-breaking number of cases and deaths – worse than the spring. Even with a vaccine on its way, it will likely take months to fully vaccinate our residents and staff, as well as the remaining public. Facilities will not be able to return to normal for some time, meaning providers need ongoing support with PPE, testing and staffing.”

“Meanwhile, nearly two-thirds of long-term-care facilities are operating at a loss, and the additional funds slated for the Provider Relief Fund for all health care providers in this legislation are minimal. Hundreds of facilities are in danger of closing their doors permanently and uprooting the frail seniors they care for. Congress must do more in the new year by directing specific aid to long-term care. We owe it to our nation’s seniors and our health care heroes.”

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