

Problem Solvers Caucus hopes to bring Democrats and Republicans back to the negotiation table with its “March to Common Ground” COVID stimulus framework



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Although Congress has not seen meaningful movement on a new COVID-19 economic stimulus bill since we last reported on the [Senate’s attempt to pass a “skinny” relief bill](#), President Donald Trump suggested on Wednesday, September 16, that he would support a larger package. In a tweet posted on September 16, President Trump urged Senate Republicans to “go for the much higher numbers” in an effort to reach some type of negotiation with House Democrats. The two parties have continued to disagree on the amount of any new stimulus package since the passing of the CARES Act in March 2020.

The president’s tweet follows the Problem Solvers Caucus’s introduction of the “[March to Common Ground](#)” COVID-19 stimulus framework. The Caucus, which is composed of 50 bipartisan members, developed the new framework in an attempt to address several key areas, including COVID-19 testing, unemployment insurance, additional direct stimulus, worker and liability protection, small business and non-profit support, food security, schools and child care, housing, election support, and state and local aid. According to [the Caucus summary](#), “the framework is designed for a six month horizon and through the next inauguration, except for state and local funding which extends for a full year.” The framework introduces new stimulus money and reallocates previously appropriated CARES Act funding:

1. **Testing and healthcare** – The propose framework provides for a total of \$100 billion for testing and contact tracing, healthcare provider support, and forgiveness of Medicare loans to providers.

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2. **Support to American individuals and families** – In order to address the increasing difficulty for individuals and families to pay for food, rent and other necessities, the Caucus proposed \$316 billion for WIC, SNAP, an additional \$1,200 stimulus check, rental assistance, and extended student loan forbearance.
3. **Unemployment assistance** – The new framework plans to allocate an additional \$120 billion for Americans who've been displaced from their jobs by providing \$450 per week for an eight week transition period, followed by up to \$600 per week. The assistance will continue for a total of 13 weeks from October 2020 through January 2021.
4. **Small business & non-profits** – Since the passing of the CARES Act, the majority of businesses that received PPP funding have exhausted those resources. To address the ongoing need for capital and to provide funding to those businesses that did not receive original PPP loans, the Caucus proposed \$240 billion for a second round of PPP loans which includes \$95 billion in new money, \$50 billion for a Targeted Employee Retention Tax Credit, and money to rectify the Main Street Lending Program.
5. **Schools and child care** – To promote remote and hybrid learning and to provide additional resources to schools, colleges and universities, the framework would provide a total of \$145 billion for additional grants for child care providers, funding for K-12 schools to provide virtual and/or hybrid learning, and an additional \$30 billion to higher education institutions.
6. **State and local aid** – Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, state and local governments have stressed the need for additional federal funding. Unlike other proposals issued by Congress, the Caucus framework would provide \$500 billion for state and local aid, including \$130 billion from the CARES Act for past state and local COVID-19 expenses, \$130 billion in new money for future state and local COVID-19 expenses, \$120.3 billion in new money for local general revenue shortfalls, \$250 billion in new money for state general revenue shortfalls, and a general tribal and territorial governments allocation.
7. **Election assistance** - \$400 million would be allocated to states to ensure that the November election is conducted as safely as possible. Funding would be used for additional poll workers, personal protective equipment, and temporary staffing.
8. **Additional allocations** – In addition to the above, \$12 billion would be allocated for expanded broadband hot spots in underserved communities, \$25 billion would be provided to agriculture and aquaculture producers, and \$15 billion for the United States Postal Service.
9. **Liability protections** – In addition to the funding provided, the framework lays out a system to protect businesses, schools and institutions from frivolous lawsuits. The Caucus encourages enhanced protections for entities which follow OSHA guidelines and robust enforcement of worker safety.

The framework is intended to push Congressional Democrats and Republicans back to the negotiating table. Representative Josh Gottheimer, Co-Chair of the Problem Solvers Caucus, stated that –

What brings us together, 25 Democrats and 25 Republicans, is our shared goal of finding a pragmatic solution, a bipartisan path forward, to help get negotiators to return to the table. Our March to Common Ground package does just that; it lays out a common sense framework to get help and resources out to American families and businesses.

It is unclear if Congress will consider this framework if and when it decides to prepare a new stimulus package. We will continue to provide updates on the framework and new COVID-19 legislation as they become available.

