



Graves on newest stimulus: 'This is just crazy'

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There are parts of the most recent COVID-19 stimulus package, mostly proposed by Democrats, that Congressman Garret Graves can get behind.

But there is plenty he can't.

Graves made that clear on Friday on a phone call with the News, as well as a Facebook post, and a video later wherein the congressman proposed some amendments to the bill which would be 'pro-Louisiana.'

In the end, however, Graves had but one statement to make about the bill.

"This is just crazy."

The 591-page bill proposed on Feb. 19 includes an additional \$300 billion to state and local governments, an additional \$130 billion to schools, and an additional \$19.1 billion to state and local governments for housing assistance to those who have not been able to pay their rent for the last year due to ongoing state lockdowns.

It also provides \$473 billion in cash payments to individuals, \$1,400 for those who earn less than \$75,000 per year, an additional \$400 in federal weekly unemployment benefits, and raises the federal minimum wage to \$15 per hour.

The bill allocates \$39.6 billion to higher education institutions – three times the amount they received last year through CARES Act funding.

It also allocates \$75 billion in cash for vaccines, \$26 billion to restaurants, \$15 billion to help fund airline payrolls, and an additional \$7.2 billion to the controversial Paycheck Protection Program, which came under scrutiny in the last round of funding.

The Wall Street Journal editorial board estimates that of the entire \$1.9 trillion proposed, about \$825 billion – or less than half – is directly related to COVID-19 relief. The majority of funds is dedicated to “expansions of progressive programs, pork, and unrelated policy changes.”

The proposed total spending, Chris Edwards, economist at the Cato Institute, told the Center Square, is adding a massive amount of debt burden on Americans.

“Congress passed \$3.5 trillion in COVID-related relief in 2020, which is a massive \$27,000 per U.S. household,” he said. “Relief bills have raised federal debt by \$3.5 trillion, which are costs pushed forward to land on young Americans in the future and reduce their living standards.”

Graves agreed.

"According to the Congressional Budget Office - which is bipartisan, by the way - the U.S. economy will recover by this summer, with no further action taken including this bill," Graves explained.

"Don't pass this to our grandchildren, where inflation means that they'll pay four times what we're paying out now."

The most recent COVID-19 relief package was passed on Dec. 27, roughly 60 days ago. Graves has asked democrats to give that relief more time to assist, especially since almost 25% of the \$4 trillion appropriated in 2020 still hasn't been spent, and is broken down as:

- **Paycheck Protection Program: \$260 billion**
- **Health spending: \$239 billion**
- **Economic Injury Disaster Loans: \$172 billion**
- **Unemployment Insurance expansion: \$172 billion**
- **Education funding: \$59 billion**
- **State and local aid: \$58 billion**
- **Stimulus checks: \$52 billion**
- **Food stamps: \$33 billion**
- **Child Care & Development block grant: \$10 billion**
- **Agriculture assistance: \$29 billion**

Graves is no stranger to government assistance and it's ability to take longer than expected, but the congressman believes that COVID-19 relief programs that have already been funded can still work given more time.

"These are programs that didn't exist the day before the law was enacted," Graves said. "It's a pretty big deal from a capability to stand all this up and for it to help as much as it did."

Much of the spending in the 2021 coronavirus bill isn't predicted to be appropriated until 2022 which, when combined with the announcement from the CBO about recovery around summertime, doesn't make much sense to Graves.

The 6th District's congressman still supports \$1,400 individual payments to those making \$75,000 or less, as well as \$1,400 payments to parents for each dependent child.

"But don't give people a \$1,400 check and make them think they got a deal," Graves explained.

8-9% of the total COVID-19 relief package goes to coronavirus healthcare, and Graves also cited the Wall Street Journal's work on 'roughly half going to COVID-19 recovery.'

The rest, Graves believes, is going to 'bailouts' for New York and California, as well about bailing out unions and pension funds.

Graves offered up the following overview for Louisiana-specific amendments to the bill:

Louisiana Flood Victims

This amendment would protect any of the funding provided to the RESTORE program from new arbitrary income criteria based on U.S. Housing and Urban Development (HUD) grants. This would help Duplication of Benefits victims and ensure that every eligible victim of the 2016 floods gets the relief they deserve and need, particularly in light of the economic hardships of the pandemic.

Disaster Assistance for Louisiana Communities

Sets aside \$10 billion for communities that were covered by a major disaster declaration in 2020.

Louisiana Teachers, Firefighters, Law Enforcement and Public Servants

This amendment revises the bill to include the Social Security Fairness Act, which repeals the Windfall Elimination Provision and Government Pension Offset to ensure retirement fairness for affected retired public servants and their families. These consequences of these unfair penalties have been compounded in the context of COVID-19.

Louisiana's Veterans

This amendment authorizes new VA leases, including for a new outpatient clinic in Baton Rouge – enhancing care for our nation's heroes during and beyond the pandemic.

Relief for Louisiana's Energy Workers

Creates a set aside for workers in the energy sector displaced or laid off due to the pandemic or by President Biden's anti-energy Executive Orders.

Louisiana's Small Businesses

This amendment clarifies the Small Business Administration's (SBA) ability to move forward on an applicant's Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loan while a previous PPP loan is under audit. Pending the result of such an audit, the Administrator may modify the repayment terms of a PPP loan.

Louisiana's Commercial Waterways

This amendment makes funds available for dredging to ensure waterways and harbors – critical components of Louisiana's economy – are accessible and efficient for commercial freight during the pandemic. A second, related amendment that Graves introduced would provide funding for the Maritime Transportation Emergency Relief Grant Program, a critical support program for our ports and maritime industries.

Louisiana's Seafood Industry

This amendment restores eligibility for USDA COVID aid for our fishing and seafood communities. The bill actually prohibits their eligibility. These workers need a lifeline as many

of our seafood businesses struggle to cope with pandemic-related restaurant shutdowns and other demand disruptions.

Liability Protection for Small Businesses and other entities

Creates a federal safe harbor from liability for COVID-19 transmission to any individual, non-profit, or business acting in good faith to prevent the spread of coronavirus.

Flexibility to Address Louisiana Homelessness

Provides flexibility for the unused funding previously allocated to other projects by creating a pilot program to allow States to convert unused housing vouchers in order to recapitalize these funds to fight and prevent homelessness.

Louisiana's Medical Research Facilities

Sets aside 5% of funding for grants to local public research institutions significantly impacted by coronavirus.

Long Term COVID-19 Impacts Studies

Prioritizes \$1,500,000 of dollars provided to the National Science Foundation to study the long-term health effects of the coronavirus.

Flexibility for Transportation Priorities

Permits a state to use allocated transit funds for other transportation purposes under Title 23 if it provides a higher benefit to cost ratio. Louisiana could use these funds for a new I-10 bridge.

Other Graves amendments are designed to establish guardrails, limits, and accountability for such enormous spending:

Unemployment

Requires individuals to repay any federal assistance they received in excess of their pre-COVID salary. No one should earn more in unemployment than they were making at their job.

No Stimulus Checks for Inmates

Prevents inmates from receiving a stimulus check.

Addressing the National Debt

Stops funds from the bill from being released if the Congressional Budget Office determines that the policies in the bill will create an extreme tax burden on our children and grandchildren.

Hard Stop for Spending

Rescinds any unobligated funds under the bill to the Treasury if the administration determines the economy has recovered to pre-pandemic levels.

Federal Minimum Wage

Stops funds from the bill from being released if the Congressional Budget Office determines that the policies in the bill will result in the loss of at least 1.4 million American jobs. (CBO has

already estimated that raising the federal minimum wage to \$15 per hour would directly result in joblessness for an additional 1.4 million Americans.)

Poverty Research

Studies the impact of President Biden's anti-energy Executive Orders on the costs to provide basic heating and electricity to those in at-risk communities.

Impacts of Domestic Production of PPE

Studies the impact of President Biden's anti-energy Executive Orders on the ability of the United States to manufacture critical PPE without domestic petroleum or other fossil fuels.