

## Congress Didn't Read \$900 Billion CCP Virus Relief Bill

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When President Donald Trump signed into law the \$900 billion CCP Virus relief bill Congress approved late Monday, it became illegal to make money by saying “Give a Hoot, Don’t Pollute.”

That’s because, as Freedom Works researchers found during the rush to passage of the measure, Section 711A makes it a federal crime to use the U.S. Forest Service’s “Woodsy Owl” character or his Hoot slogan in commercial profit-making activities.

The owl and slogan have no connection to the disease that is also known as the novel coronavirus, but lots of things that have no obvious link tend to be lumped together in last-minute legislative “Christmas Trees” like the virus relief bill.

Other examples include Section 1111 that authorizes \$15 million for the Department of the Interior to establish a “Snow Water Supply Forecasting” unit, and Title XII on “Horseracing Integrity and Safety” that establishes an “independent Horseracing Safety and Integrity Authority.”

Such unrelated provisions have become commonplace in the past decade as Congress has regularly failed to meet its deadlines for doing annual budgets through 12 separate major appropriation bills debated in committees and then enacted through floor votes of the Senate and House under the Budget and Impoundment Acts of 1974.

Instead, under Democratic and Republican leadership, Congress has routinely waited until the last minute to enact massive “omnibus” spending bills like the CCP Virus relief measure and the \$1.4 Trillion spending package that funds the government until Sept. 30, 2021.

The pressure is immense on every senator and representative to drop objections to particular provisions they oppose in order to vote for such bills because they contain so many essential provisions.

Even so, this year’s last-minute rush produced protests from members across the ideological spectrum.

Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Texas), one of the Senate’s most conservative members, blasted the process on Twitter, condemning how the combined bills were enacted:

“It’s ABSURD to have a \$2.5 trillion spending bill negotiated in secret and then—hours later—demand an up or down vote on a bill nobody has had time to read. #CongressIsBroken.”

Cruz was responding in agreement with Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-N.Y.), the self-proclaimed “Democratic-Socialist” who had just tweeted that “Congress is expected to vote on the second largest bill in US history \*today\* — \$2.5 trillion — and as of about 1pm, members don’t even have the legislative text of it yet.”

Ocasio-Cortez, who ultimately supported the measure, added in another tweet that, “It’s not good enough to hear about what’s in the bill. Members of Congress need to see & read the bills we are expected to vote on. I know it’s ‘controversial’ & I get in trouble for sharing things like this, but the people of this country deserve to know. They deserve better.”

Rep. Morgan Griffith (R-Va.) put the matter bluntly, issuing a statement after the House voted, explaining why he voted for the relief bill but against the spending bill.

“The omnibus spending bill for fiscal year 2021 is the longest bill I’ve been asked to vote on in Congress. It was split into two parts running nearly 5,600 pages. The first totaled roughly 500 pages and included funding for the military and border security, including the border wall. I read this part and found its spending to be largely reasonable, so I voted for it.

“The second part containing the remaining 5,000 pages, while reportedly including some provisions I support, also reportedly featured far too many items that have no place in a spending bill.

“Members of Congress had only a few hours to read and analyze this overstuffed monstrosity. As I have pledged to the constituents of the Ninth District, I will not vote for a bill I have not read in its entirety. I voted no.”

Similarly, Rep. Tulsi Gabbard (D-Hawaii) issued a video statement after the House vote explaining her vote against the spending bill. She said “there was no way that anybody in Congress had the opportunity or the time” to read the draft.

Rep. Ted Budd (R-N.C.) told The Epoch Times the whole process was “as swampy as it gets.”

Both chambers of Congress have rules requiring 48 hours for members to read bills before voting on them, but those rules are routinely waived, especially when omnibus or emergency proposals are being considered, according to veteran congressional aides and policy advocates.

“It is an affront to the taxpayer that Republicans and Democrats have agreed to a process that hides the details of a massive spending bill from the American public,” Brian Darling, former senior counsel to Sen. Rand Paul (R-Ky.), told The Epoch Times.

“Hidden behind the facade of a coronavirus relief package with big ticket direct payments for families and more aid to small business are a plethora of earmarks, special interest provisions and hidden new spending,” said Darling, who now heads the Washington, D.C.-based Liberty Government Affairs.

Cato Institute budget and regulatory expert Chris Edwards noted that “the combined bill is 5,585 pages in length. At 11 inches a page, that’s 61,435 inches or 5,120 feet. That means Congress is rushing through a complex bill text on almost a mile of paper that no member has read or likely ever will read.”

Americans for Tax Reform President Grover Norquist told The Epoch Times “the 48-hour rule is most important when one party writes the entire bill, but this legislation was watched carefully by both party leaders. The missing eyes on the legislation were those of the American people who did not know what would be added at the last minute.”