$1.9 Trillion “American Rescue Plan Act of 2021” Clears Final Congressional Hurdle

The House on Wednesday gave final approval to HR 1319, the “American Rescue Plan Act of 2021.” Final passage came on a mostly party-line vote of 220-211. No Republicans supported the bill and one Democrat, Jared Golden of Maine, opposed the bill. President Biden is expected to sign the bill into law as soon as the enrolled version of the bill arrives in the Oval Office.

The $1.9 trillion, 628-page bill includes hundreds of provisions, including substantial funding for public health resources to battle the coronavirus, speed up the distribution of vaccines, and provide aid to impacted Americans. The measure extends unemployment benefits through Sept. 6, including the $300 weekly Federal add-on, provides $1,400 checks to 85 percent of US households, significantly expands the child tax credit and the earned income tax credit (EITC), and provides additional food aid as well as $42.5 billion in housing aid to low-income and unemployed families and individuals. The bill also provides $362 billion in direct aid to states and local governments along with $123 billion for K-12 schools, $39 billion for
childcare, and $30.5 billion for transit systems. It also provides $53.6 billion in aid to businesses, including almost $29 billion specifically for restaurants.

Among the many public health and higher education provisions in the bill:

- $7.7 billion for HHS to establish, expand and sustain a public health workforce to help respond to the current pandemic.
- $39.6 billion for colleges and college students as part of a Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund. Institutions receiving aid must dedicate at least half of the funding for emergency financial aid grants to prevent hunger, homelessness, and other hardships that students are facing because of the pandemic. Funds can also be used for general expenditures for institutions of higher education to cover those expenses associated with a disruption in services or operations related to coronavirus, including defraying expenses caused by lost revenue and reimbursing expenses already incurred.
- $7.5 billion for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to prepare, promote, administer, monitor and track coronavirus vaccines.
- $1 billion for the CDC to strengthen vaccine confidence and provide education regarding vaccines to improve vaccination rates.
- $7.6 billion for vaccination, testing and associated activities at Community Health Centers.
- $47.8 billion for HHS activities to detect, diagnose, trace, and monitor Covid-19 infections (and requires HHS to implement a national strategy for testing, contact tracing, surveillance, and mitigation of Covid-19).
- $6.1 billion to support advanced research, development, manufacturing, production and purchase of vaccines, therapeutics, and ancillary medical products.
- $10 billion is provided to support the production, purchase, and distribution of critical materials and equipment under the Defense Production Act.
- $50 billion to FEMA’s Disaster Relief Fund, with much of the funding to be used to reimburse state and local governments for Covid-19 related expenses such as vaccination efforts, the continued deployment of the National Guard, providing personal protective equipment for critical public sector employees, and disinfecting public facilities.
- $3.0 billion for HHS’s Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) for the Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment and Community Mental Health block grant programs. It
also provides funding for three separate efforts to help health care professionals and first responders.

- The bill expands access to health care by providing tax subsidies to a wider range of individuals and families who purchase health insurance on the markets established under the Affordable Care Act; temporarily covers the entire cost of COBRA premiums for individuals who lose their jobs; and incentivizes additional states to expand Medicaid as allowed under the ACA.
- $122.8 billion to support state and local funding for K-12 schools and public postsecondary institutions (with funding to be used for repairing and enhancing school ventilation systems, reducing class sizes and implementing social distancing guidelines).
- $800 million for the National Health Service Corps — with $100 million reserved for state student loan repayment programs.
- $6.1 billion for tribal health programs — including $600 million for vaccine-related activities; $1.5 billion for testing, tracing, and mitigating Covid-19; $420 million for mental and behavioral health prevention and treatment services; $600 million to lease, construct or equip health facilities to respond to Covid-19; and $10 million for potable water delivery.

Resources Related to the “American Rescue Plan Act of 2021”:

- Final text of HR 1319
- House Report 117-7 (filed by the House Budget Committee)
- Congressional Budget Office Scoring
- House Budget Committee’s Section-by-Section Analysis (Feb. 22)
- Senate Budget Committee’s Summary (March 3)

Other Headlines:

- ASPPH Urges Biden to Nominate Joshua Sharfstein to Lead the FDA: ASPPH on Tuesday wrote to President Biden urging him to nominate Joshua Sharfstein (Johns Hopkins) as Commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). ASPPH said Dr. Sharfstein’s
“previous experience with the FDA and governmental and academic public health makes him superbly prepared to be Commissioner and will allow him to make an immediate impact on the FDA. Moreover, his record of integrity, leadership, collaboration, and consensus building will allow him to utilize the broad portfolio of the FDA to advance [Biden’s] agenda.” Dr. Janet Woodcock is currently serving as Acting Commissioner of the FDA.

- **PRC’s to Assess Covid Vaccine Confidence and Uptake:** The CDC has allocated $13 million to provide noncompetitive supplementals to the 26 Prevention Research Centers (PRCs) to assess Covid-19 vaccine confidence and uptake. The funding comes from the December Covid relief bill and is in addition to their $27 million annual appropriation. ASPPH is a strong advocate for the PRC program both on Capitol Hill and with CDC.

- **Senate Labor-HHS Ranking Member Blunt Will Not Seek Reelection:** Senator Roy Blunt (R-MO), ranking member of the Senate Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Subcommittee, announced on March 9 that will not seek reelection in 2022. Sen. Blunt is a member of the Senate Republican leadership, serving as the Republican Policy Committee Chairman. Blunt joins four other Republican senators – Rob Portman (OH), Pat Toomey (PA), Richard Shelby (AL), and Richard Burr (NC) – not seeking reelection.

- **Bright Named to New Rockefeller Foundation Position:** The Rockefeller Foundation on March 8 announced the appointment of Dr. Rick Bright as Senior Vice President of Pandemic Prevention and Response. The Foundation said, “In his new capacity, Dr. Bright will lead the Foundation’s work to collaborate with leading global public health emergency organizations and entities to develop a pandemic prevention institute that aims to avert future pandemics by identifying and responding to the earliest alerts of a disease outbreak and stopping it in the first 100 days.” Dr. Bright was most recently HHS Deputy Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response and Director of the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (BARDA).

- **Covid Recovery Requires Addressing Economic Inequities:** On March 4, Dr. Richard Besser, president and CEO of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, wrote an op-ed in *The Hill* newspaper on how Covid-19 recovery requires addressing economic inequities. Areas of concern highlighted in the article include housing, nutrition assistance, paid leave, and unemployment insurance.

- **NIAID Retirement of Note:** John J. McGowan, PhD, has retired from the NIH’s National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases after 34
years of federal service. Most recently (and for more than 15 years),
he served as NIAID Deputy Director for Scientific Management and
Executive Officer. He has joined Guidehouse, “a leading global
provider of consulting services to the public and commercial
markets,” as a director.

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