released, is going to stimulate our economy substantially, in my judgment.

Everyone involved is doing a wonderful job on the vaccines. President Trump's team did a wonderful job. President Biden's team is doing a good job. The Governors seem to be doing a great job. People are getting vaccinated. We know that we have a lot of people in America who had the virus and didn't even know it. We are rapidly approaching the point where, either through vaccination or people who had the virus and therefore have the antibodies, we are going to have way over the majority of American people protected.

So one point of view is that we don't need to spend $1.9 trillion, but there was a middle ground here, and I am disappointed that the President took the position that, look, we need to spend $2 trillion right now, even though there is $1 trillion at least in previously appropriated funds that we haven't spent yet.

Now, a reasonable approach would have been to say: Do we really need to spend $2 trillion? Maybe we ought to spend the other $1 trillion and see if that will do it. Another reasonable approach would have been to say: Maybe we ought to reprogram some of the $1 trillion that hasn't been spent. For example, we appropriated I think about $70 billion to our elementary and secondary schools. They have only spent $4 billion, so why are we giving them another $160 billion in President Biden's bill? Maybe—I am not saying it is the case, but we ought to explore it—maybe the schools didn't need the full $70 billion we gave them if they have only spent $4 billion or $5 billion. So maybe we can reprogram some of that money.

Now, if we had this money sitting in a checking account, I would still think—because it represents a scarce resource, I would still think that we need to take a look at the money we have already sent and either spend it, if it is well placed, or reprogram it before we go out and spend $2 trillion. But we don't have the money in a checking account. We will borrow every penny of this money, $2 trillion. That is going to bring debt up to 27, 28, 29 trillion dollars, and we know that right behind it is going to come a green infrastructure bill. I am hearing that could be $2 trillion to $3 trillion more. At some point, we are going to run out of digits. I mean, at some point, we are going to have to change the name of the Department of Treasury to the ''Department of Debt'' because there is no treasury left. It is all debt.

The other thing that bothers me about the bill is President Biden—and, again, I understand politics. He has marketed this bill as an emergency. It is an emergency. We have to do it now. Right now, we need $1.9 trillion to deal with the economic crisis caused by the lockdown. And I understand that argument and that there currently are some Americans who need help, but if what the President is saying is accurate, then why is so much of the money not even going to be spent until a year from now?

I look at the bill, and I say, if all that is true to deal with an immediate crisis, why are we giving money to States and local governments that have actually seen their revenues go up? Why? There is no crisis. And I look at the bill and I ask myself, you know, why are we giving money to bail out pension plans? Can we talk about this? And I look at the bill and I say, why, as I just alluded to, why are we giving $160 billion—I think that is the figure—$160 billion to our elementary and secondary education institutions when we have given them $70 billion in the past and they have only spent $4 billion? Where is the fire? They have $65 billion or so left. This is real money. There is no money fairy.

I look at the bill—I mean, I want to help the American people. Gosh, many of them do need help. But should we really be sending stimulus checks to people who have never missed a paycheck out there? Do they really need the money if they haven't been laid off and if they have been paid the entire time of the lockdown? Why are we doing this?

Couldn't that money—first of all, one option is not to spend it if there is not a need. We can pay down our debt or at least not increase our debt. Another option would be to spend it on something that we really need.

I come to the conclusion—I am not trying to be mean-spirited, but that is why I say calling this a coronavirus bill, you know, it is like calling Harvey Weinstein a feminist. This isn't a coronavirus bill, not the way it has been portrayed.

Now, the American people still have needs. We still have some folks, primarily in the leisure industry and in the travel industry, who need our help. They do need help.

We have a lot of folks who have lost their jobs through no fault of their own. They are on unemployment that is about to run out. They need our help, and we ought to help. But the right way to do this is to sit down as a body—Democrats and Republicans—and go through our needs, not our wants, because that is another problem with this bill; it is more ''wanty'' than needy. Let's go through our needs, and let's discuss how much money we should appropriate to those needs in light of the facts that we have already spent $4 trillion and we have a bunch of money left over. And that is not the way this is being done.

This is just being rammed down our throats. This is just raw gut politics, which I understand. I have been around it. You have, too, Mr. President. We have both been around the block a few times. But that is not how you allocate scarce resources.

The final point I will make is, I know when we did the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act—''we,'' meaning the Republicans—we went through reconciliation. We did. And so a fairminded person might be thinking, well, KENNEDY, you know, how can you criticize your Democratic colleagues for using reconciliation if you did it? And that is fair, except when we did the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, we asked our Democratic friends in leadership: Can we sit down and see what we can put together? And we were told: No, we don't want to reduce taxes.

That is not what happened this time. Ten of my colleagues—I wasn't invited, and that is OK. But 10 of my colleagues went to the White House and visited with President Biden for 2 hours and came back and said: You know, I think he may want to put a bill together. And we were excited. We were going: Yay, that is great. Wonderful.

Then, the next thing we knew, the White House issued a statement and said: Our idea of unity is to do what we say and don't ask questions.

Both of us know that is not unity.

So all of this could have been avoided. It all could have been avoided. And I think we are going to end up spending money that doesn't need to be spent right now. I think we are going to end up spending money where we don't need to spend it.

I am so glad that Senator SCHUMER withdrew his bridge project and that Speaker PELOSI withdrew her Silicon Valley subway. That is just spending porn as far as I am concerned.

But, in any event, I wanted to get that off my chest. We are going to go through a vote-arama, where we all offer amendments. Maybe together we can make this bill better and get rid of some of the spending porn, as I call it, and do the job that the American people sent us here to do.

Thank you.

I don't see Senator SANDERS. I'm sorry.

With that, I yield to my good friend Senator PETERS.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

## AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT OF 2021

Mr. PETERS. Mr. President, as we near the 1-year anniversary of the coronavirus pandemic ripping our country, there is no question that Michiganders and people all across our country are still hurting.

While we are making important progress in the fight to combat this virus, this public health and economic crisis continues to take a significant toll on families, workers who are out of a job, educators, students, small businesses, hospitals, and communities all across our country.

We passed targeted, temporary relief in December, but we knew at that time that that was not going to be enough. We need more robust, meaningful relief. We must act quickly to meet the urgency of this moment by swiftly passing the American Rescue Plan.

This is about relief for Michiganders and Americans who are reeling and are trying to make ends meet, funding to help schools safely reopen, sources to speed up vaccine distribution, and support for small businesses fighting to stay afloat.

I continue to hear from Michiganders from all across the State who are struggling to put food on the table, pay their rent, and keep the lights on. These folks are not asking for a handout; they simply want a lifeline to get to the other side of the pandemic.

When we passed $600 relief checks in December, I pledged that we must do more and that we could do that by providing people with an additional $1,400 to fulfill the promise of $2,000 in relief funds. With the American Rescue Plan, the majority of Michiganders and Americans who received these relief checks in December are going to be eligible once again.

This bill would mean a family of four could receive an additional $5,600. That support is vital to make sure that people don't fall into poverty as a result of this pandemic and that they can get back up on their feet as quickly as possible.

We know that millions of workers across our country, including workers in Michigan, are on the verge of seeing unemployment benefits expire on March 14. We cannot abandon folks who are out of work through no fault of their own because of COVID–19. They have seen this pandemic disrupt their jobs and their incomes. The need for unemployment assistance is widespread, and it is necessary in Michigan.

For example, there were over 840,000 active claims for Michiganders for unemployment assistance in Michigan just in February. That is up from 529,000 in January. And these claims for assistance come from every single county all across our State. We need to act now so these individuals remain eligible for unemployment benefits, including if they were self-employed workers, like small business owners, freelance workers, independent contractors, or gig workers. We must ensure families receiving unemployment have enough assistance to get by, which is why I support an additional $400 in weekly benefits. We also need to provide certainty that this assistance will continue to be there for them in the months ahead, not just for the next few days. The American relief plan will do just that by bolstering our State unemployment programs with additional Federal support through August 29.

To help families get back to work, we all know that we must also safely reopen our schools. Many parents and educators are struggling to assist children through lessons while juggling other work and caregiving demands during the pandemic. The American Rescue Plan reflects a point of consensus that we want our students to return to in-person learning as quickly and as safely as possible. And the more resources that we can provide, the better.

In response to the negative impact that COVID–19 has had on education, a stronger and urgent investment in our schools is absolutely critical for achieving safe operations and recovering from gaps in learning. That is why the American Rescue Plan is absolutely essential.

This legislation will provide $170 billion in emergency funding to our schools and to our students, with $130 billion for K–12. The funding will help schools take steps based on science and recommended by the CDC to ensure that students and educators can safely return to the classroom. This includes repairing ventilation systems, reducing class sizes, implementing social distancing guidelines, purchasing personal protective equipment, and hiring support staff to care for students' health and their well-being.

Every family and community has been facing a very unique set of challenges, and we need to provide robust funding so schools and parents have what they need to keep children connected with learning opportunities that are both safe and effective.

And while these are important steps, we also know that if we are going to come back stronger from this pandemic, we also need to support the very backbone of our economy, which is our small businesses. While we have passed several rounds of relief for small businesses, too many of our hard-hit small businesses are still reeling—from restaurants to boutiques, to family-owned and minority-owned businesses.

The American Rescue Plan has significant small business relief, including $25 billion in grants for restaurants and bars that have lost revenue because of the pandemic; $15 billion for economic injury disaster loan advance grants; $7 million in funding for Paycheck Protection Program loans and expanded eligibility for nonprofits.

Additionally, this package reauthorizes and provides $10 billion in Federal funding—including $1.5 billion specifically for minority-owned small businesses—to the State Small Business Credit Initiative.

I was proud to help establish this program in 2010 while serving in the House of Representatives. This program is a proven success. In Michigan, it has helped small businesses create or retain over 12,000 jobs, and it strengthens State programs that support financing of small businesses, allowing them to both grow and to create more jobs.

I am pleased to again champion this program, and with additional investment, it will again provide crucial support to small businesses in Michigan and all across our country.

And, finally, to completely get this pandemic under control, we must ramp up the distribution of vaccines. That is one of my top priorities as chairman of the Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs.

Thanks to the extraordinary work of our scientists, our researchers, and our vaccine makers, especially those in my home State of Michigan, we now have three safe and effective vaccines. But I know that many people have been frustrated and darn right angered by the difficulties they have had in trying to secure vaccines for their loved ones or for themselves. I am encouraged that President Biden and his administration have been working tirelessly to expand vaccine production and speed up vaccine distribution. But to get those additional vaccines into people's arms, it will take additional resources.

Through my work on the Senate Homeland Security Committee, I have been leading the charge to ensure that the Federal Emergency Management Agency has the essential staff, supplies, transportation, and other resources necessary to ensure that every vaccine dose is actually reaching an arm in this country.

I have spoken with President Biden both in the Oval Office and at the Pfizer vaccine facility in Portage, MI, about the critical need to expedite the deployment of vaccines and to do everything—do everything in our power to ensure vaccines are free and widely available in every community as quickly and as efficiently as possible.

The American relief plan includes $50 billion to help FEMA support a national vaccine program to efficiently administer vaccines, including underserved communities. It also provides frontline medical professionals the personal protective equipment, testing supplies, and workforce needed to slow and to eliminate the spread of COVID–19.

All of these resources are mission critical as FEMA plays a leading role in assisting the Federal Government's response to COVID–19 by coordinating medical supply acquisition and distribution and assisting State and local governments with funds for response activities, such as vaccine distribution and overtime pay for public health officials.

As we consider the American Rescue Plan, there are signs of hope, particularly with ramped-up vaccine production. We are beginning to emerge from a very dark winter, but our work is not done.

We cannot be complacent. We cannot let up. This virus does not take a day off, and neither can we.

We must pass the American Rescue Plan. This package is not only what the American people need, but it is what they want. There is widespread support across the country for this package—from mayors to Governors, to economists across the political spectrum, and the majority of the American people.

We must deliver comprehensive and urgently needed relief so we can do just that by passing the American Rescue Plan. This package will not mark the end of our efforts to crush this virus, but it will provide a massive shot in the arm to help families, to safely open up our schools, and to accelerate the development of more vaccines.

So, with that, I urge all of my colleagues to support the motion to proceed and final passage.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

## FEDERAL MINIMUM WAGE

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, later today or tomorrow, as part of the American Rescue Plan, which we will be discussing in the next few days, which I happen to believe is the most significant piece of legislation to come to the floor of the Senate in decades in terms of addressing the crises facing working families—as part of that piece of legislation, I will be offering an amendment to raise the Federal minimum wage from $7.25 an hour, which I believe is a starvation wage, to $15 an hour over a 5-year period—5 years.

I think there has been some miscommunication around here, and there are people who are saying it is going from 7.25 to 15 bucks an hour in 1 year. Not true. It goes from 7.25 to 9.50, to 11, to 12.50, to 14, to 15 dollars an hour. So anyone who says we are raising the minimum wage in 1 year, in the midst of a pandemic, to $15 an hour is simply not telling the truth.

This amendment is similar to a bill which I have brought forth, the Raise the Wage Act, which I am proud to say has been cosponsored by some 38 Members of the Senate, and this is also similar to legislation which has already passed the U.S. House of Representatives. And I thank them, and I thank my friends in the Progressive Caucus in the House for doing a great job in pushing this legislation.

I should also add, for my Senate colleagues, that this legislation raising the minimum wage is supported by some 300 national organizations, including the 12 million members of the AFL–CIO and virtually every major union in this country. This is something that unions like the SEIU, one of the largest unions in this country, have been fighting for, for a very long time.

I should also add here that while raising the minimum wage is going to impact every low-wage worker in this country—because African-American and Latino workers often are earning poverty wages—it significantly impacts the lives of the minority communities as well. That is why, among so many other organizations supporting this amendment, it is supported by the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights; it is supported by the National Organization for Women because, again, when we talk about low-wage workers, we are talking about the minority community, we are talking about women; and that is why it is supported by groups like Unidos, the American Association of University Women, Indivisible, Justice for Migrant Women, the National Domestic Workers Alliance, and the National Women's Law Center.

So, once again, this is legislation that will increase wages for 30 million American workers. And if you ask me what the great economic crisis in our country is today, it is not just high unemployment; it is not just income and wealth inequality; it is that half of our people today, and before the pandemic, were living paycheck to paycheck. Their wages were so low that if they had a problem with their car or their kid got sick, suddenly they were in financial crisis.

And in the richest country in the history of the world, half of our people should not be facing economic desperation when their car breaks down. The reason for that is, significantly, that many millions of workers are earning starvation wages—and I underline that, starvation wages—in this country.

I would love to hear anybody get up here and tell me that they could live on seven and a quarter an hour, they could live on 8 bucks an hour, they could live on 9 bucks an hour. You can't. And I have been all over this country, and I have talked to workers who are making 10, 11 bucks an hour, with tears streaming down their cheeks, telling me what it is like to work for starvation wages and try to raise your kids.

So the time is long overdue. The last time this Congress passed an increase in the minimum wage was in the year 2007—2007. It is time to raise the minimum wage. It is time to raise the minimum wage to a living wage of 15 bucks an hour.

Now, later on today or this evening, as part of my support for this enormously important piece of legislation—and, as chairman of the Budget Committee, I will be speaking more about why we need to raise the minimum wage, but I want to focus on one part of the minimum wage bill that I have been hearing a little bit about in the last couple of days from some of my colleagues, and that is the provision to raise the tipped wage.

Now, the tipped wage, so everybody understands it, is the Federal minimum wage that applies to waiters and waitresses, barbers, hair stylists, parking attendants, and others. Fellow Americans, do you know what that Federal minimum wage today is for that person who waits on your table at a restaurant? It is $2.12 an hour. Yeah, you heard me correctly: $2.12 an hour.

And the proposal, as part of the minimum wage bill, the amendment that I will be offering, is that tipped minimum wage would go up from $2.12 an hour to $14.95 over a 7-year period, longer than the overall national minimum wage would go up. And this is something that clearly is desperately needed.

Now, I know that, here in Washington, anytime we bring forth serious and important legislation for working people, the Big Money interests get to work, and all of their lobbyists, who make their six figures or seven figures a year, they get to work on Congress and tell you why you can't do anything to protect the most vulnerable and hard-hit people in this country.

So the National Restaurant Association, they are a very powerful lobbying organization. I guess they have been enormously successful because we have not raised the Federal minimum wage since 2007. So the powerful lobbying organizations are going around, and they are telling Members of the House and the Senate that raising the tipped wage is opposed by restaurant workers and it would be harmful to the interest of waiters and waitresses and other people.

That is not true. That is what lobbyists say, representing Big Money interests. That is what they are paid to say, but that is not what workers who wait on tables are telling us.

One Fair Wage, a grassroots organization representing service employees—waiters, waitresses, and others—has just delivered to the White House a petition with 140,000 signatures on it from service workers who are demanding that they receive the same minimum wage as every other worker in this country. And polling among service employees and nonservice employees also supports the reality that Americans want our waiters and our waitresses and other service employees to get a fair and equal minimum wage, similar to what other low-wage workers are receiving.

Now, I have heard from some who tell me that people who are waiting on tables—and, by the way, I was one of the worst waiters in the history of the country, but I was a waiter a long time ago. I know a little bit about it. I am hearing from some that waiters and waitresses, they are doing really well, making a whole lot of money, and they don't need an increase in the minimum wage.

Let's be clear. When you talk about the restaurant and the hotel industry, you are talking about mass discrepancies in the kind of incomes that people receive. I will not deny it for a second. My daughter worked in a fancy restaurant. She did quite well.

So if you are working in a hotel in a fancy restaurant where you have a menu that is quite expensive—you have got a $100 meal and your 20 percent is 20 bucks, you are waiting on three or four tables—you are doing OK. I don't deny that for a second, and I wish those waiters and waitresses who work so hard continued success.

But let us be clear. Not everybody works in a fancy restaurant or a big hotel which has a high-priced menu. You have got a whole lot of people working in diners, working in working-class restaurants where the menu is not that fancy, and maybe it is $10 for