

Ynet-News, May 15, 2020 – Friday

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28 states ban business contracts that follow Palestine-led boycott against Israel

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Jordan lobbies the EU conflict to reject Trump's Mideast plan of annexation

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Netanyahu postpones inauguration to allocate significant portion of cabinet posts

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Pelosi demands over \$3T liberal stimulus bill completely unrelated to COVID-19

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28 states ban business contracts that follow Palestine-led boycott against Israel

05.15.20

Missouri lawmakers pass bill against boycotting Israel

The bill would require companies to sign a contract pledging not to boycott Israel in order to do business with Missouri but some members said awarding business contracts based on political opinions is dangerous dangerous

Associated Press| Published: 05.15.20 , 20:58

Missouri lawmakers on Thursday passed a bill to ban the state from doing business with companies that boycott Israel.

The GOP-led House approved the measure 95-40 on Thursday, the day before their Friday deadline to pass bills this year.

Lawmakers are rushing to pass as many bills as possible after taking several weeks off over concerns about spreading the coronavirus. They returned to the Capitol days before Gov. Mike Parson's statewide stay-at-home order expired May 3.

Many are not wearing masks, but some are.

The boycott bill is in response to a Palestinian-led boycott movement against Israel.

The BDS movement promotes boycotts, divestment, and sanctions of Israeli institutions and businesses in what it says is a nonviolent campaign against Israeli abuses against Palestinians. Israel says the campaign masks a deeper goal of delegitimizing and even destroying the country.

The Missouri bill would require companies to sign a contract pledging not to boycott Israel in order to do business with Missouri. It wouldn't apply to contracts worth less than \$100,000 or companies with fewer than 10 employees.

At least 27 other states have passed similar policies, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

Republican Rep. Holly Rehder led the Senate bill through the House. She said doing anything to support the boycott movement goes against Missouri's economic policies and would be "absurd."

"The legislature has taken bold action to combat the insidious and hateful BDS movement that singles out Israel and encourages punitive actions against its economy and citizens, said Nancy Lisker, director of the American Jewish Committee St. Louis Region. But the bill drew bipartisan opposition from lawmakers who said it tramples on Americans' right to free speech through protests.

Republican Rep. Tony Lovasco said awarding business contracts based on political opinions would be "incredibly dangerous." He said criticizing a government is not the same as criticizing the people who live in that country.

"I am incredibly critical of our government, for example," Lovasco said. "I'm not anti-American. I love this country. I don't want to be in a position where my criticism of our government's choices and how our government spends, or in my mind wastes our money, is going to result in my being placed in effectively a blacklist."

The measure now heads to Republican Gov. Mike Parson.

05.15.20– Fr - - -

Jordan lobbies the EU conflict to reject Trump's Mideast plan of annexation

05.15.20

Jordan warns Israel of 'massive conflict' over annexation

Jordan has been lobbying the EU to take 'practical steps' to make sure annexation doesn't happen but member countries appear too divided to take any major action, such as imposing sanctions

Associated Press| Updated: 05.15.20 , 17:16

Jordan's king warned Israel of a "massive conflict" if it proceeds with plans to annex large parts of the occupied West Bank, as European Union foreign ministers met Friday to discuss what action the bloc might take in response to such a move.

Israel has vowed to annex Jewish settlements and the Jordan Valley, which could spell the end of the long-stalled peace process by making it virtually impossible to establish a viable Palestinian state. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has moved a step closer by reaching an agreement to form a government after more than a year of political deadlock.

President Donald Trump's Middle East plan, which overwhelmingly favors Israel and was rejected by the Palestinians, gave a green light to annexation, but most of the rest of the international community is strongly opposed.

"Leaders who advocate a one-state solution do not understand what that would mean," Jordan's King Abdullah II said in an interview with the German magazine Der Spiegel published Friday.

"What would happen if the Palestinian National Authority collapsed? There would be more chaos and extremism in the region. If Israel really annexed the West Bank in July, it would lead to a massive conflict with the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan," he said. Jordan is a close Western ally and one of only two Arab states to have signed a peace treaty with Israel. Abdullah declined to say whether annexation would threaten that agreement.

"I don't want to make threats and create an atmosphere of loggerheads, but we are considering all options. We agree with many countries in Europe and the international community that the law of strength should not apply in the Middle East."

EU foreign ministers had planned to welcome the formation of a new Israeli government and offer the bloc's cooperation, but Netanyahu and his rival-turned-partner, Benny Gantz, have postponed the swearing-in of their controversial new Cabinet as the Israeli leader tries to quell infighting within his Likud party.

The ceremony, originally scheduled for Thursday, is now planned for Sunday to give Netanyahu more time to hand out coveted Cabinet appointments to members of his party. Their coalition agreement allows him to present an annexation proposal as soon as July 1, and the EU ministers are struggling to thrash out a common position should the move go ahead.

The 27-nation bloc has routinely condemned Israeli settlement expansion and warned against annexation, but member countries appear too divided to take any major action, such as imposing sanctions. They are also limited to holding informal talks via video-conference because of the coronavirus pandemic.

"This is a very divisive issue inside the council" of ministers, EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said Monday. "Everything in foreign policy requires unanimity, especially sanctions. So we are, for the time being, far away from discussing about sanctioning."

Borrell said the talks are nevertheless important for setting out the positions of the 27 countries on “the respect of international law, and how can we judge this announced annexation in order to clarify the position of the European Union.”

In February, he affirmed the bloc’s commitment to a two-state solution in the Middle East based on the 1967 lines, with the possibility of mutually agreed land-swaps. Israel seized east Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in the 1967 war. The Palestinians want all three to form their future state.

The EU has already rejected Trump’s Mideast plan, which would allow Israel to annex about a third of the West Bank, leaving the Palestinians with heavily conditioned statehood in scattered territorial enclaves surrounded by Israel.

Jordan has been lobbying the EU to take “practical steps” to make sure annexation doesn’t happen.

In a statement, Jordan’s Foreign Minister Ayman al-Safadi “stressed the need for the international community and the European Union in particular to take practical steps that reflect the rejection of any Israeli decision to annex.”

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05.14.20 – Th - - -

American Israel Committee AIPAC stands with Democrats, opposing Trump plans

05.14.20

AIPAC: 'Mistake' if U.S. changes relationship with Israel over annexation

Traditionally bipartisan pro-Israel lobby tells members it would not object if Jerusalem goes ahead with West Bank plan, but has reportedly not taken an official position on issue

i24NEWS| Published: 05.14.20 , 22:32

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) said that it would be a "mistake" for the United States to change its relationship with Israel if the Jewish state goes through with plans to annex territory in the West Bank, according to a letter the lobbying group recently sent to its supporters.

The letter, obtained by the Israeli media, says that “some have proposed reducing our ties with Israel because they object to the potential decision by Israel’s leaders to extend Israeli sovereignty to parts of the West Bank. Doing anything to weaken this vital relationship would be a mistake.”

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced his intention of extending Israeli sovereignty over parts of the West Bank including settlements and the Jordan Valley as part of his election campaign following the unveiling of President Donald Trump’s peace plan.

AIPAC, an influential lobbying group designed to protect Israeli-American interests, officially supports a two-state solution, which Palestinians, former Israeli security

officials, and international experts believe would be irreparably **harmed by Israel's** even partial **annexation** of West Bank territory.

“Despite the increasingly close ties between the two allies, it is inevitable that there will be areas of political or **policy disagreement between leaders on both sides** – as there are between America and all our allies,” the letter reads.

According to Haaretz daily, **AIPAC has not taken an official position on annexation**, but if Netanyahu and Trump's administration decide to move forward on “applying sovereignty” to parts of the West Bank, the lobbying group would not be **opposed**.

Historically a **bipartisan organization**, **AIPAC** has struggled in recent years to maintain its **healthy standing with Washington Democrats** as **Israel continues to drift toward the political right** under successive Netanyahu governments.

05.14.20 – Th - - -

30 Israeli tourists stuck 52 days on beach; Morocco not allowing Israel flights

05.14.20

Israeli tourists return home after two months stranded in Morocco

Despite bureaucracy and lack of diplomatic relations, joint effort to bring back group of 30 holidaymakers was success; one returnee says he spent **52 days** sleeping on the beach, found locals very helpful

Itay Blumenthal | Published: **05.14.20**, 21:41

A group of **30 Israelis** were brought back from Morocco to Israel on Wednesday night, after they were **stranded in the north African country for two months due to** the coronavirus **epidemic**.

After various bureaucratic hurdles, and with the help of several businessmen, the Israeli group managed to board a special Air France flight from the city of **Casablanca to Paris**.

From there, the group boarded a **private Boeing 767 airplane**, which **landed in Israel** around 5 am, marking the **retrieval operation a success**.

"I went to Morocco to enjoy life," said 32-year-old Bar, who took part in the rescue flight on Wednesday night.

"I arrived in Morocco in February, and it took them a very short time to announce the closure. I and many other **tourists were unable to leave Morocco for our own countries**."

Although Morocco has not had an open diplomatic relationship with Israel since 2000, thousands of Israelis visit the country every year.

"Morocco is an incredible country with amazing people," said Bar.

"Because we had nowhere to go, I stayed for 52 days on the beach with other tourists, while some of us built tents and some slept in caravans, the Moroccans around us helped us constantly," said Bar.

"There was not a moment of hostility. People heard that I was from Israel and told me 'we are brothers'. I was made to feel welcome and felt a little at home because my grandmother was originally from Morocco."

Another passenger who found himself stuck in Morocco said he never thought he would be stranded for so long away from home. "There was a lot of bureaucracy to get us out of there," he said.

"People had run out of medication and money. Only thanks to the intervention of private bodies and some government agencies did the flight happen."

"We were told not to talk about it so that it would not be canceled at the last minute," he said. "Only when we landed in Paris did we breathe a sigh of relief. I haven't seen my family in Israel in over two months."

Likud MK Nir Barkat, who is expected to be appointed minister in the next government, was among those who intervened to make the flight a reality.

"I am excited to see this plane land here in the country and I was delighted to have had the opportunity to be a part of this operation," Barkat said.

"The rescue is an exceptional expression of Israel's mutual guarantee of its citizens," the former Jerusalem mayor said. "Even during the coronavirus crisis, Israel does not abandon its citizens and goes to great efforts to help and return them to Israel."

As Israel carried out multiple flights to return its nationals from all around the world, discussions were also being held with Morocco regarding sending a special flight to collect the Israeli citizens stranded there.

On Wednesday, reports claimed that the rescue effort had been delayed by about a month due to a tweet on the issue posted by Foreign Minister Israel Katz.

According to the reports, the tweet from Katz prompted Morocco to revoke its consent for an Israeli plane to land within its borders.

05.14.20 – Th - - -

Schools require masks outside classrooms, rotating attendance, social distancing

05.14.20

Netanyahu orders schools to reopen for all age groups on Sunday

The PM accepted a proposed Education Ministry plan to reopen schools but announced areas with a high rate of infection must remain closed or under limited access to students

Itamar Eichner | Published: 05.14.20 , 19:02

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu approved the complete reopening of schools as of Sunday in line with an Education Ministry plan that will see all students back in the educational system.

The ministry describes the plan as voluntary because many parents would be reluctant to send their children back to school while COVID-19 could still be infecting Israelis.

Local governments are also given leeway to reopen their facilities when they determine they are prepared.

The proposed complete reopening would exclude cities and communities where a high rate of COVID-19 infections have been identified in recent months including Beit Shemesh, Bnei Brak, Hura, and some Jerusalem neighborhoods.

"We would like to stop this current format, as it presents many difficulties and interrupts educational, social, and emotional contiguity," said Education Ministry Director-General Shmuel Abuav. "Considering the low contagion rates, I would like to promote the full return of the education system where we'll closely monitor illness rates. However, schools in areas with high infection rates will return gradually and in accordance with Health Ministry orders."

All earlier guidelines limiting the number of students per class and separating children into study groups to isolate them from other children will be canceled.

According to the ministry's plan, the government will review its decision on June 1 to determine whether there is a spike in the number of infections of COVID-19 that would warrant a change in policy.

The plan stipulates that schools will take special care of hygiene, students will be required to present a declaration of health signed by parents before being allowed back onto school grounds.

Schools will maintain social distancing between students during meals and on breaks and will require children to wear facial masks when outside of their classrooms.

Children from fourth grade and up will have to wear their facial masks in class as well. In case of infection by the virus is discovered in any particular facility, the ministry will determine the steps that would be taken to mitigate spread.

A dedicated team of officials will be assigned to prepare a proposed plan should a spike in cases occurs that would require a closure of all or part of the educational system once again.

The previous outline devised by the health and education ministries suggested fourth through tenth-grade students would return to school under a limited format that would include rotating attendance.

This proposal came under heavy criticism from parents, educators, and local authorities who demanded the old outline to be scrapped and release the entire education system instead.

Worried parents even called on parents not to send their children back to school if the limited format is implemented.

05.14.20 – Th - - -

Netanyahu postpones inauguration to allocate significant portion of cabinet posts

05.14.20

Netanyahu postpones government swearing-in ceremony until Sunday

PM has not found positions for seven of his close allies, most of whom were ministers in his previous cabinet; Gantz withdraws resignation as Knesset speaker due to delay in assuming new post as defense minister

Ynet| Updated: 05.14.20 , 18:23

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Thursday delayed the swearing-in of the new government, just hours before it was due to take place, until Sunday.

The prime minister has not yet finalized a new position for seven of his close supporters most of whom were ministers in his recent cabinet.

Netanyahu's political partner, Blue & White leader Benny Gantz agreed to the delay in order to give Netanyahu more time to allocate cabinet posts to those Likud members, a joint statement said.

With the postponement, Gantz withdrew his resignation as Knesset speaker as he will not be taking up his new post as defense minister until then.

A significant portion of the posts have not yet been filled, leaving responsibility for budgets worth tens of billions of shekels to last-minute horse trading.

"It's stuck with some of the ministries. Netanyahu has yet to reach a deal with Yoav Galant, Ze'ev Elkin, Nir Barkat, Gila Gamliel, Tzipi Hotoveli, David Amsalem and Avi Dichter," Likud officials said.

Dichter said that he decided not to participate in Thursday's vote on the establishment of the government because he said Netanyahu had not bothered to meet with him at all to offer him a proper role in the new cabinet.

The former Shin Bet chief told his associates: "Such disrespect is not shown only to me, but spits in the face of 130,000 Likud officials who elected me to the top 10 of the Likud."

With its inauguration, Israel will have the biggest government in its history, ending an 18 months-long political deadlock.

Netanyahu formally announced Wednesday evening in letters to Gantz and President Reuven Rivlin that he had succeeded in forming a new government.

The new unity government will be sworn in after lawmakers vote to approve its composition. According to the agreement, Gantz is set to replace Netanyahu as prime minister after 18 months.

The new cabinet is set to be the biggest in Israel's history with at least 34 ministers, backed by a coalition of at least 72 MKs.

The religious-Zionist Yamina party was not expected to join the new government after talks on Wednesday between its leader Naftali Bennett and Netanyahu failed to yield any results.

On Thursday morning, Bennett launched an attack on the prime minister, calling him "weak" in the face of threats emanating from the Gaza Strip.

Yamina's Rafi Peretz, however, is set to be part of the new government after meeting with Netanyahu late Wednesday.

Sources say the outgoing education minister was offered the position of minister at the head of a new ministry that will oversee settlements but Peretz had reportedly refused the position.

Among the prominent ministerial appointments in the new government are Blue & White MK Gabi Ashkenazi, who will become foreign minister, Likud MK Israel Katz who will serve as finance minister, Blue & White MK Avi Nissenkorn who will take on the justice portfolio and Likud MK Yuli Edelstein, who has already replaced Yaakov Litzman as health minister.

Likud MK Yariv Levin is expected to become the next Knesset speaker after Gantz resigned from the position on Wednesday.

Labor MKs Amir Peretz and Itzik Shmuli are expected to become economy and welfare ministers, respectively.

Derech Eretz MK Yoaz Hendel will be appointed communications minister. Hendel and Zvi Hauser recently split from the Telem party, which used to be a part of Blue & White. Blue & White's Pnina Tamano-Shata will head the Aliyah and Integration Ministry, making history as Israel's first Ethiopian-born minister. Michael Biton is set to head the Ministry of Minority Affairs and Omer Yankelevich will head the Diaspora Affairs Ministry.

Blue & White MK Chili Tropper on Thursday morning took over from Miri Regev as Culture and Sports minister.

In addition, on Thursday morning Gantz informed MK Alon Schuster that he will serve as Agriculture Minister in the new government. Schuster served as the head of the Sha'ar Negev Regional Council, which borders the Gaza Strip, for over 16 years.

Litzman, who heads the United Torah Judaism party and recently quit as health minister, is set to receive the housing and construction portfolio, while Shas leader Aryeh Deri will remain in his role as interior minister.

As part of the coalition agreement between Shas and Likud, the Ministry for Religious Affairs will be headed by MK Rabbi Yaakov Avitan, currently the deputy mayor of Ashkelon.

Likud MK Miri Regev is slated to become Transportation Minister, with Netanyahu reportedly offering her the foreign affairs portfolio when Gantz takes over the premiership in 18 months.

Amir Ohana, currently serving as Justice Minister, will likely head the Ministry of Public Security, which is currently occupied by Gilad Erdan and was for a time slated for Regev. Erdan is headed to New York, where he will be ambassador to both the U.S. and the United Nations.

The **Intelligence** Ministry will go to Likud MK Yoav **Galant**, the **Regional Cooperation** Ministry to Likud MK Ofir **Akunis**.

Gesher chief Orly Levy-**Abekasis**, whose political alliance with Labor and Meretz gave her a seat in the Knesset, will head a newly created ministry dubbed the Office for **Community Strengthening** and Promotion.

Likud and Blue & White on Wednesday evening released the **principles of the new government**.

According to the document, the government will **form an emergency cabinet** meant to deal with the coronavirus outbreak and the accompanying economic crisis. The cabinet's work is to establish a "**socioeconomic safety net**" and special programs for citizens who are struggling financially.

The document also said one of the new government's main objective is to maintain the country's security and stability.

"Out of the belief that the **Jewish people** have the **inviolable right to a sovereign state** in the Land of Israel, the **national and historic homeland of the Jewish people**, the government will also address all issues relating to the peace, security and prosperity of Israel," the statement said.

According to the statement, the **government will push to "strengthen national security** and strive for peace, ensure equal opportunity for all Israelis, **boost the economy**, work to bridge between all parts of the nation, preserve Israel's Jewish and democratic character, and **encourage immigration of Jews** to the country, among other policy stances."

The **principles did not specifically mention the possible annexation of territories** of the West Bank, a step that under the coalition deal can be **set in motion** as early as **July 1**.

First published: 11:51 , 05.14.20

05.14.20 – Th - - -

Israel cooperation with US banned China Huawei phones, violate privacy of users

05.14.20

Israel's cooperation with China is 'dangerous,' hints U.S. official

During a press briefing on **Pompeo's visit**, the official says COVID-19 **highlights the threats in dealing with Chinese** government and its **technology**; believes U.S.' message to Israel on the issue is 'getting through'

Ynet| Published: **05.14.20** , 09:15

A United States official on Thursday hinted that **Israel's continued cooperation with China might be "dangerous"** in light of the current coronavirus outbreak and **could undermine the relations with its "strategic partners"**.

During a State Department press briefing on Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's visit in Israel, which began on Wednesday, the official said the COVID-19 pandemic "highlights the dangers of dealing with states that are not transparent."

State Department and Pompeo have in recent days launched a number of verbal attacks on the Chinese government, accusing it of covering up the severity of the disease, when it initially broke out in the city of Wuhan in December of 2019.

"In particular there's the issue of strategic investment, that there is no such thing as a privately owned, independent company in China, right." the official said. "If you use Huawei, if you use any type of company that has access to your DNA, that DNA becomes property and that information becomes property of the Chinese Communist Party."

Chinese Huawei smartphones have been banned in the U.S. at least through May of 2021 out of fear the phones violate privacy of the users. In Israel, however, the phones are sold freely with the Wonder Woman star Gal Gadot even appearing in the commercial for the company.

"And so that's a security issue. And so, whether it's the large infrastructure projects, things they can do to those infrastructure projects, there are all kinds of dangers, and we – I think it's important for us as allies, strategic partners to be able to discuss the type of threats and the types of ways to mitigate those kind of threats."

When asked if the State Department has been pervasive in getting their global partners, including Israel, and doing less business with China, he said "the message is getting through."

"I think we've been allies with Israel for a long time," said the official. "Our strategic relationship is getting closer every day, whether this is economically, whether this is in terms of military, intelligence sharing, across the board. We have a relationship that's mature enough to talk about difficult subjects."

05.14.20 – Th - - -

US accuses Iran of defying UN nuclear resolution deal that expires in October

05.14.20

U.S. accuses Iran of defying UN nuclear deal resolution

Washington says Tehran violated 2015 agreement by launching a satellite last month, while supplying arms to proxy forces in Lebanon, Syria, Yemen and others highlights Iran's violations of the arms embargo

Associated Press| Published: 05.14.20, 08:38

The United States accused Tehran on Wednesday of defying the UN resolution endorsing the 2015 Iran nuclear deal with a satellite launch last month and also argued it is continuing to violate a UN arms embargo.

The U.S. Mission to the United Nations made the allegations at an informal meeting of experts from the Security Council committee that monitors implementation of the resolution.

Tensions between Iran and the U.S. have escalated since the Trump administration withdrew from the nuclear deal between Tehran and six world powers in 2018 and reimposed crippling U.S. sanctions. A year ago, the U.S. sent thousands more troops, long-range bombers and an aircraft carrier to the Middle East in response to what it called a growing threat of Iranian attacks on U.S. interests in the region.

The meeting that the United States called Wednesday appeared to be another step in its campaign to pressure Iran to stop interfering in the region and halt what the Trump and Israel believe is its pursuit of nuclear weapons, which Tehran denies.

The session was held soon after U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo discussed Iran with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu during a surprise one-day visit and after he talked by phone with Estonian Foreign Minister Urmas Reinsalu, whose country holds the Security Council presidency this month. State Department spokesperson Morgan Ortagus said they discussed “cooperative efforts” in the council “aimed at preventing conflict and promoting peace worldwide.”

A statement from the U.S. Mission said the United States raised the April 22 satellite launch carried out by Iran’s Revolutionary Guard Corps at Wednesday’s meeting. It said that defied the 2015 resolution, which calls on Iran not to undertake any ballistic missile-related activities capable of delivering nuclear weapons.

The statement called the Guard Corps “a terrorist organization” and said: “Its leading role in Iran’s space program puts to rest Iran’s absurd claims that its space program is solely civilian in nature. It is not.”

The launch was a first for the Guard, revealing what experts described as a secret military space program that could accelerate Iran’s ballistic missile development.

At the meeting, the U.S. said, it also highlighted Iran’s violations of the arms embargo, “reminding council members that Iran continues to funnel weapons to proxy forces and terrorist groups in places like Yemen, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Bahrain.” It accused Yemen’s Iranian-backed Houthi Shiite rebels of using Iranian technology several weeks ago “to again launch ballistic missiles and explosive drones into Saudi Arabia.”

The arms embargo is scheduled to expire in October and the United States circulated a draft UN resolution that would indefinitely extend it to a small number of council members in late April. It would strike the expiration of the arms embargo from the council resolution that endorsed the 2015 nuclear deal, according to Trump administration officials and UN diplomats.

Russia’s UN ambassador, Vassily Nebenzia, whose country has veto power in the Security Council, said at a news conference Tuesday that the arms embargo was “a byproduct” of the nuclear deal, not part of it, and was temporary.

“I do not see any reason why an arms embargo should be imposed on Iran,” he said. “It expires in October. ... And for us that’s clear, that’s clear.”

05.15.20 – Fr - - -

Pelosi demands over \$3T liberal stimulus bill completely unrelated to COVID-19

05.15.20

NEWS

Republicans rip Pelosi over \$3T coronavirus stimulus bill

By Steven Nelson May 15, 2020 | 3:13pm | Updated

Speaker Nancy Pelosi, saying the \$3 trillion HEROES Act is a transparently unserious wishlist.

The bill is likely to pass the House on Friday and although Democratic leaders insist Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) must allow a vote, some Democrats admit the bill’s simply an opening volley in negotiations.

“This really is an exercise in legislative futility,” said Rep. Tom Cole (R-Okla.), who managed morning House floor debate for Republicans. “As a package, it’s going nowhere.”

“It would make more to sense in my view, Madam Speaker, to send it straight to Santa Claus,” Cole quipped.

Republicans object to the bill leaving out wording from the Hyde Amendment, which they say could allow for federal funding of abortions. A different section removes a work requirement for food stamps, while another adds protection against deportation for certain illegal immigrants, Republicans say.

“Any time they start adding in attempts to provide federal funding for abortions in a COVID-19 response, we know they’re not serious,” Sen. Mike Rounds (R-SD) told The Post.

In a reflection of the wide-ranging priorities incorporated in the package, the bill would clarify that banks can work with state-legal cannabis businesses — a long-stalled reform backed by members of both parties.

The futility of the Democratic bill was manifest in the disinterest of journalists. Hardly any were perched above the House floor during debate on Friday.

And during morning debate on both the bill and a different resolution to allow for proxy voting, Republicans focused most of their scorn on possibly allowing members to vote for one another during the pandemic.

Pelosi says she's done answering questions about Biden sexual assault claims
Republicans said the proxy voting change centralizes power with party bosses and sets the wrong tone when workers across the US are returning to work.

“We are setting a terrible example” said Rep. Debbie Lasko (R-Ariz.).

Lasko offered her thoughts on the coronavirus legislation, too. She dubbed the \$3 trillion package “the Keep People Unemployed Act,” saying she opposes a measure that would expand a **\$600-per-week boost in unemployment** insurance pay until January.

The bill includes almost \$1 trillion in funding for state and local governments, which Republicans including President Trump are wary of granting. It would authorize another round of direct checks up to \$1,200, create a \$200 billion “heroes fund” giving hazard pay to medical workers, **allocate \$175 billion to rent and mortgage aid** and spend \$75 billion on virus testing and contact tracing.

Rep. Jim McGovern (D-Mass.) said he was perplexed by Republicans pumping the brakes.

“It’s like we’re living in the Twilight Zone. **We are at the beginning of this pandemic,** Madam Speaker, **not the end,**” he said.

Only one Republican — Rep. Peter King of New York — has said he will support the HEROES Act. Moderate and left-wing Democrats also may revolt. The Congressional Progressive Caucus, whose members wanted a bigger bill, unsuccessfully implored Pelosi to delay the vote. Rep. Kendra Horn (D-Okla.), a member of the centrist Blue Dog Coalition, said she will vote “no.”

McConnell, meanwhile, said Democrats are slowing the process of **negotiations** on a **fifth major coronavirus bill**. Negotiations on a prior bill, the \$2 trillion CARES Act, broke down in March, he recalled, after Pelosi proposed a rival bill that Republicans said was stuffed with extraneous provisions.

“While we finalized the CARES Act, the House parachuted in with miscellaneous **liberal demands completely unrelated** to COVID-19 — **solar energy tax credits,** airline admissions,” McConnell said.