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Franklin: Democrats' \$1.9 trillion stimulus bill wasteful, fails to target needs

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"Today, on this January day, my whole soul is in this: Bringing America together. Uniting our people. And uniting our nation. I ask every American to join me in this cause."

President Joe Biden spoke these words at his Jan. 20 inauguration. Since that day, we have seen everything but unity. My colleagues on the other side of the aisle just forced a costly bill through Congress disguised as relief—a bill that will burden our children and grandchildren with a debt they cannot repay.

After emphasizing the importance of unity, President Biden and the Democrats fully rejected attempts to work together to find bipartisan solutions to the ongoing pandemic. Instead, they opted to ram through a hyper-partisan agenda. Throughout this rushed process, my Republican colleagues and I introduced more than 250 amendments to ensure transparency, accountability and fairness in this relief package. All but one of our amendments were rejected on straight party lines. Certainly, this can't be the unity the President had in mind.

Just days before I was sworn into office, the 116th Congress passed a \$900 billion bipartisan COVID relief package that was signed into law. Since the pandemic started, approximately \$4 trillion has been allocated and roughly \$1 trillion remains unspent. Instead of spending taxpayer funds we don't have on partisan pet projects like pension bailouts or a Silicon Valley subway, Congress should be focused on domestic issues like infrastructure repair, healthcare and ensuring unspent funds reach individuals and small businesses truly in need.

House and Senate Democrats used a budget tactic called reconciliation to pass this costly \$1.9 trillion partisan spending spree innocently called the American Rescue Plan. This package is cluttered with provisions that will harm small businesses and stifle the economy, yet the plan fails to target those most in need of COVID assistance.

Despite \$60 billion in unspent school funding from prior relief packages, this package allocates another \$100 billion to schools without requiring them to open. Thankfully, our schools in Florida are open, but across the country, millions of kids are still struggling with online learning. They continue to fall farther behind because the president refuses to honor the science and stand up to the teachers' unions.

While targeted relief is crucial to help American families, borrowing money against our children's future for a partisan wish list is irresponsible. The Congressional Budget Office estimates our economy will grow by 3.7% this year without this spending spree. The U.S. economy is currently healthier than previously projected, yet Democrats chose to add to our staggering national debt instead of focusing on targeted relief. Even some of the president's closest economic advisers warn that it's precisely this overspending that could cause interest rates to spike and send our economy into recession.

At a time when unity is the stated goal, my Democrat colleagues categorically reject any attempts to work together. I came to Washington to help make a positive difference in the lives of the people of Florida's 15th Congressional District, but Democrats' continued dismissal of any input from the Republican side of the aisle silences our constituents. I opposed this reckless partisan spending package because it does too little for those most in need while saddling our youth and future generations with its exorbitant price tag. Congress must do better.

U.S. Rep. Scott Franklin is a former Lakeland city commissioner in his first term in Congress. He represents Florida's U.S. House District 15.

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