

New Mexico leaders discuss American Rescue Plan

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‘Game changers’ for the state

The U.S. House and Senate passed the American Rescue Act of 2021, a \$1.9 trillion economic stimulus package, on March 10, and New Mexico leaders wasted no time discussing what the ramifications of the package mean for the state. This discussion was held in an online roundtable on March 10.

While most of the discussion has been spent on items like the \$1,400 stimulus payment for qualifying Americans and extension of unemployment insurance, Sen. Martin Heinrich, D-N.M., wanted to highlight the other parts of the Act that he believes are game changers for New Mexico.

“This is going to supercharge the already robust efforts of our governor and our state to vaccinate New Mexicans,” Heinrich said.

A crucial part of the act is \$20 billion to allow the Biden Administration to improve the production, administration, and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines nationwide. It also includes provisions to increase vaccine delivery to veterans and tribal communities.

This means an increase in the amount of COVID testing, genomic sequencing to stay ahead of new variants, expansion of contact tracing, and increases in the procurement of personal protective equipment.

“In a very real way, I believe today is the beginning of the end for this pandemic,” Heinrich said.

Heinrich also highlighted the \$31 billion that is being invested into Native tribes across the country.

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“This piece of legislation is the single greatest investment in Indian Country in American history,” he continued. “We have to reduce the stark and incredibly persistent inequities in transmission, hospitalization, and death rates [in Indian Country].”

There will be about \$1 billion flowing into New Mexican tribes, Heinrich said. The amount includes “unprecedented levels” of federal funding to increase access to clean water, electricity, broadband, and the basics that are underserved in many tribal communities.

The expansion of the child tax credit is another area of the Act that Heinrich said has not been discussed as much, which he added is enormous for New Mexico.

“We’re looking at nearly every child in the state. About 95 percent will benefit by expanding the child tax credit, taking it from \$2,000 to \$3,600 per child, and making those payments monthly,” Heinrich said.

The legislation will also allow New Mexico to safely reopen its schools, he continued. This is through \$1.2 billion for K-12 schools to address the needs to get the schools open by covering sick leave, technology, and air filtration upgrades throughout the classrooms.

Heinrich highlighted one more section of the Act meant to boost restaurants and other entities that were hit hard by the pandemic: \$25 billion nationally in direct grants focused on local businesses.

Heinrich then made one important plea to the public:

“Please, New Mexico, file your taxes,” Heinrich said. “That’s how the government is going to find you for these programs. So this year, whatever else you do, make sure you file your taxes.”

Sen. Ben Ray Luján, D-N.M., said he also believes the legislation, which is now headed to President Joe Biden’s desk for his signature, is the biggest leap toward stopping the spread of

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COVID-19 and reopening schools, businesses, and workplaces.

“The American Rescue Plan makes strong investments in our hospitals, rural health clinics, and Indian Health Services. It includes billions of dollars for vaccines, testing, contact tracing, as well as resources to address health disparities in communities of color, tribal communities, and rural communities,” Luján said.

Rep. Teresa Leger Fernández, D-N.M., said the passage of the legislation is proof that the government is working.

“The House, the Senate, the President are responding to the promises made to the American people to rescue our country from the pandemic, and that’s what we’re doing,” she said.

Fernández spoke about the \$2.5 billion from the legislation that is going to help the state, local, and tribal governments climb out of the crisis.

“I’ve talked to the mayors and local officials and tribal leaders, Republicans and Democrats, and I’ve asked them ‘What do you need to address this crisis?’ And this plan answers their requests for direct payments, for help to open their fairgrounds and small businesses. They’re ready to receive this lifeline and put it to use,” Fernández said.

This result will also be seen in other states and communities, which Fernández believes will be a crucial step forward for the country.

“All Americans are going to benefit from this day,” she said.

Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham, D-N.M., reiterated that the passage of the legislation is what happens when a collective government is working together to serve the people who elected them.

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“This is a day of incredible recognition,” she said. “This [legislation] is the best leadership out of a presidential administration showing that American people come first.”

She spoke about the boost the legislation will give to families who are either in danger of or have fallen into poverty in the past four years.

“President Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris with the leadership of the Democrats in the House and the Senate, quite literally, declared war on poverty once and for all by creating universal benefits and lifeline and life-long assistance,” Lujan Grisham said.

Through the benefits of the legislation and the virtue of state leaders, Lujan Grisham said this leads to about 25 percent of New Mexico families immediately being lifted out of poverty.

“There are no words to describe the impact that has on a state that has long had extreme and persistent poverty,” she continued. “This is exactly the investment we have always deserved, and we need now more than ever.

“It is a time not only for great celebration, but to make sure we clarify and talk to the individuals and families, telling them to file their tax returns and engage with their elected officials,” she said. “We are surviving this pandemic, but with the American Rescue Plan, we don’t just survive, we have the opportunity to rebuild, regain, to readjust. There isn’t a single working family in New Mexico who isn’t going to benefit by these efforts. I am really honored to be able to thank this delegation for making sure we have the tools and resources to ensure this is the safest state in the country in our response to the pandemic and any other public health issue ever again.”

Lujan Grisham concluded by highlighting the benefits that will be provided by the investments to broadband, tribal communities, and state schools and how they could impact New Mexico in the future and how the state could now compete with the U.S. and the world in each of those fields.

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“This may be the only opportunity to connect all of New Mexico once and for all,” Lujan Grisham said. “New Mexico deserves to be competitive with the rest of the country and the globe, and New Mexico deserves every opportunity to be that competitor.”