

Baldwin says bipartisan negotiations have led to 80 percent agreement on congressional COVID relief

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U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin says a bipartisan group of Senate lawmakers has sent a pair of COVID-19 relief package proposals to congressional leaders for final negotiations.

According to Baldwin, negotiators have thus far hashed out differences on about 80 percent of the issues, including an extension of the Paycheck Protection Program and support for small businesses, a continued moratorium on evictions and foreclosures, rental assistance, and an extension of unemployment insurance, among a host of other measures.

But she said at a Greater Madison Chamber of Commerce “DC Meets Madison” webinar today that lawmakers are still divided on sending cash to state and local governments and providing liability protection.

What’s more, she said the White House and lawmakers from across the ideological spectrum — from conservative Missouri U.S. Sen. Josh Hawley to liberal Vermont Independent U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders — are also pushing for another round of direct stimulus payments similar to the \$1,200 checks some received earlier this year. Baldwin said she also wants to see stimulus payments.

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Earlier, U.S. Rep. Mark Pocan, D-Town of Vermont, told the GMCC meeting that he expected a coronavirus relief package this year, but that it likely would fall short on new state and local government aid. He talked extensively about how to improve the PPP program, adding that the voice of small businesses needed to be heard in

Congress. To that end, the small business owner noted that House Speaker Nancy Pelosi had invited him to be part of Congress' Joint Economic Committee and mentioned the need for broader efforts, including boosts to infrastructure, in the new Congress.

Baldwin said negotiators have put together two packages: one encompassing the proposals on which consensus has been reached plus aid for state and local governments and liability protection and a second that strips out those elements and only includes measures negotiators have already agreed upon.

Baldwin said those two packages are now in the hands of the White House and the so-called "four corners" — Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., and Pelosi.

She said that group has agreed the areas of consensus should be "the framework for their final touches" while state and local aid and liability protection are "on the table." Stimulus checks could also "jump back in" but Baldwin said any package would have to be "guided" by a roughly \$900 billion limit.

Baldwin said she hoped to see the three outstanding issues resolved and a coronavirus relief package attached to a federal omnibus spending bill and passed ahead of government funding running dry on Friday at midnight.

"That's a tall order but there's something magic about deadlines — nobody wants to see the government close," she said. "We've gotten this far to have pretty much an omnibus that's ready to go and a COVID relief package that's 80 to 85 percent there."