US relief package provides $7 billion for broadband



After months of deliberation, congressional leaders reached a $900 billion coronavirus relief deal on Sunday, including billions in funding for broadband internet access.

Congress’ latest relief measure provides $7 billion in funding for broadband connectivity and infrastructure. That figure includes $3.2 billion for a $50-per-month emergency broadband benefit for people who are laid off or furloughed during the pandemic, according to a press release from Sen. Ron Wyden’s (D-OR) office on Sunday.

“Broadband connections are essential for Americans seeking to get new jobs, and to access school, health care and other government services,” Wyden said in a statement Sunday night. “Ensuring working families can stay online will pay massive dividends for kids’ education, helping people find jobs and jump starting the economic recovery next year.”

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Axios reported Sunday that the coronavirus relief bill also includes $1.9 billion to remove Huawei and ZTE equipment from US networks. In June, the Federal Communications Commission officially designated Huawei and ZTE as national security threats. In doing so, the FCC banned US companies from purchasing the equipment with government money. Earlier this month, the agency moved to require US telecom companies to "rip and replace" any Huawei or ZTE equipment currently deployed in their networks.

The deal also includes $1 billion in Tribal broadband grants, $250 million toward telehealth, and $65 million for broadband mapping improvements, according to *Axios*. The US's broadband maps have been the target of criticism for years. The FCC's current methodology declares an entire ZIP code as having broadband if just one home in that census block is served.

The $900 billion COVID relief bill includes a new round of direct payments, following the same requirements as the first round of stimulus checks earlier this year. This package provides stimulus checks of up to $600 per person for people earning up to $75,000 a year and another $600 for their children, according to *The New York Times*.

https://www.theverge.com/2020/12/21/22193133/us-coronavirus-covid-relief-stimulus-package-broadband-huawei-zte