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Southern DAILY

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U.S. senators scurry to refine Biden's \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 aid ahead of vote



for vaccines, and getting their children plugged in to remote learning during the pandemic. A Senate aide familiar with negotiations said there also were discussions of tightening income qualifications for people receiving the \$1,400 direct payments.

Moderate Democratic Senator Joe Manchin said he wants the House's \$400-per-week temporary federal unemployment benefit reduced to \$300. The Senate aide said there also were moves to "turn the spigot off" on the payments as state jobless rates sink below a certain threshold.

Democratic Senator Jon Tester, following a conversation he and other senators had with Biden on Monday, told reporters: "We talked about the package and we talked

Texas governor lifts state's mask mandate, says all businesses may open

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Negotiations over President Joe Biden's \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief bill go into overdrive this week as the U.S. Senate begins debate over the sweeping legislation and lawmakers jockey to include pet projects such as broadband connectivity.

FILE PHOTO: The U.S. Capitol Building is reflected against an ambulance along the East Front on Capitol Hill in Washington, U.S., July 16, 2020. REUTERS/Tom Brenner/ Senator Angus King, an independent who aligns with Democrats, has been pushing for billions of dollars to expand high-speed broadband service in rural areas -- an idea that could attract Republican support.

The Senate was due to take up as early as Wednesday the measure passed last week-end by the House of Representatives.

Democratic senators were privately discussing among themselves and with Biden ways to reallocate at least some of the huge pot of money.

The version of the bill passed by the House would pay for vaccines and medical supplies and send a new round of emergency financial aid to households, small businesses and state and local governments. It includes \$1,400 direct payments to individuals, a \$400-per-week

federal unemployment benefit through Aug. 29, and help for those having difficulty paying rents and home mortgages during the pandemic

The Senate version is likely to include at least one major change: Eliminating a minimum wage increase to \$15 per hour over five years from its current \$7.25. Late last week the effort was blocked under special rules designed to ease passage of this legislation in the Senate.

Democrats are expected to resuscitate their minimum wage initiative sometime after the COVID-19 bill is enacted.

Congress is trying to give final approval to Biden's top legislative priority as the pandemic already has taken the lives of 514,000 Americans.

"Millions of jobs and trillions of dollars have been taken out of our economy," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said on the Senate floor on Tuesday. He said the bill "is designed to finish the job, to patch up the holes in our economy and lay a foundation for our recovery."

Schumer will need the support of all 48

Democrats and the two independents who caucus with them, as well as Vice President Kamala Harris' tie-breaking vote to pass the measure before some jobless benefits expire on March 14.

Three centrist House of Representatives members, Democrats Josh Gottheimer and Abigail Spanberger and Republican Tom Reed on Tuesday urged congressional leadership to devote \$45 billion to help local communities connect to the internet.

They want the money to come out of the \$350 billion for state and local aid included in the bill.

Their argument is that those with poor or no broadband access are stymied in accessing medical services, including registering



(Reuters) - Texas Governor Greg Abbott said on Tuesday that his state's mask mandate will be lifted and all businesses will be allowed to open at full capacity, local media reported.

"It is now time to open Texas 100%," Abbott said, adding that the lifting of the COVID-19-related restrictions will go into effect March 10, a local ABC affiliate in Lubbock reported.



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WEA LEE'S GLOBAL NOTES

03/02/2021

CORONAVIRUS DIARY

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Myanmar Military Force Opens Fire On Protesters

Myanmar security forces on Sunday launched their most violent and deadly crackdown against peaceful protesters. At least 18 people died and more than 30 people were injured.

According to the UN Human Rights Office, police attempted to extinguish a nationwide protest movement against a military coup in which they arrested the civil leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

A UN statement condemned the

escalating violence and urged the military to immediately halt the use of force against the peaceful protesters. But military leaders ignored it.

Myanmar (also called Burma) is one of the richest countries in Asia with vast natural resources. The country produces oil, jade and rice. Most of the people in Myanmar are Buddhists. Most of the young people want to become monks when they grow up.

I spent my early young age with my family in the northern part of Burma. I still remember the nation was so poor with no running water or electricity. When General Ne Win came to power in 1960, he nationalized all the businesses under the government, making all one hundred and fifty dollar bills worthless.

It is very sad that such a beautiful country is still under a corrupt government. We all hope that Burma will come out of this conflict and become a peaceful nation.





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Editor's Choice



Migrants wait at a tent where they are being tested for the coronavirus at the Leona Vicario temporary migrant shelter, before being transferred to continue their asylum request in the United States, in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico March 1, 2021. REUTERS/Jose Luis Gonzalez



A woman checks the temperature of a child as migrants from Central America, under the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) program, wait to take a test for the coronavirus at the Leona Vicario temporary migrant shelter before being transferred to continue their asylum request in the United States, in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico February 26, 2021. REUTERS/Jose Luis Gonzalez



Migrants wait to take a test for the coronavirus at the Leona Vicario temporary migrant shelter, before being transferred to continue their asylum request in the United States, in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico March 1, 2021. REUTERS/Jose Luis Gonzalez



Migrants walk across the Paso del Norte international border bridge from the Mexican side to continue their asylum request in the United States, in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico March 1, 2021. REUTERS/Jose Luis Gonzalez

ERCOT Reports: Texas
Only ‘Seconds And Minutes’
From Months - Long
Blackouts Catastrophe



A map of the electrical grids in Texas. (Graphic by ERCOT)

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

(TEXAS TRIBUNE) - Texas’ power grid was “seconds and minutes” away from a catastrophic failure that could have left Texans in the dark for months, officials with the entity that operates the grid said Thursday. As millions of customers throughout the state begin to have power restored after days of massive blackouts, officials with the Electric Reliability Council of Texas, or ERCOT, which operates the power grid that covers most of the state, said Texas was dangerously close to a worse-case scenario: uncontrolled blackouts across the state. The quick decision that grid operators made in the early hours of Monday morning to begin what was intended to be rolling blackouts — but lasted days for millions of Texans — occurred because operators were seeing warning signs that massive amounts of energy supply was dropping off the grid. As natural gas fired plants, utility scale wind power and coal plants tripped offline due to the extreme cold brought by the winter storm, the amount of power supplied to the grid to be distributed across the state fell rapidly. At the same time, demand was increasing as consumers and businesses turned up the heat and stayed inside to

avoid the weather. “It needed to be addressed immediately,” said Bill Magness, president of ERCOT. “It was seconds and minutes [from possible failure] given the amount of generation that was coming off the system.”



Grid operators had to act quickly to cut the amount of power distributed, Magness said, because if they had waited, “then what happens in that next minute might be that three more [power generation] units come offline, and then you’re sunk.” Magness said on Wednesday that if operators had not acted in that moment, the state could have suffered blackouts that “could have occurred for months,” and left Texas in an “inde-

terminately long” crisis. The worst case scenario: Demand for power overwhelms the supply of power generation available on the grid, causing equipment to catch fire, substations to blow, power lines to go down. If the grid had gone totally offline, the physical damage to power infrastructure from overwhelming the grid can take months to repair, said Bernadette Johnson, senior vice president of power and renewables at Enverus, an oil and gas software and information company headquartered in Austin. “As chaotic as it was, the whole grid could’ve been in blackout,” she said. “ERCOT is getting a lot of heat, but the fact that it wasn’t worse is because of those grid operators.” If that had occurred, then even as power generators recovered from the cold, ERCOT would have been unable to quickly reconnect them back to the grid, Johnson said. Grid operators would have needed to slowly and carefully bring generators and customers back online, all the while taking care to not to cause more damage to the grid. It’s a delicate process, Johnson explained, because each part of the puzzle — the generators producing power, the transmission lines that move the power, and the customers that use it — must be carefully managed.



“It has to balance constantly,” she said. “Once a grid goes down, it’s hard to bring it back online. If you bring on too many customers, then you have another outage.” ERCOT officials have repeatedly said that the winter storm that swept the state caught power generators off guard. The storm far exceeded what ERCOT projected in the fall to prepare for winter. “The operators who took those actions to prevent a catastrophic blackout, and much worse damage to our system, that was, I would say, the most difficult decision that had to be made throughout this whole event,” Magness said. Nine grid operators are working at any given

time who make these sorts of decisions, said Leslie Sopko, a spokesperson for ERCOT. “At the end of the day, our operators are highly-trained and have the authority to make decisions that protect the reliability of the electric system,” she said in a statement. ERCOT made “significant progress” overnight Wednesday to restore customer power to many Texans, and remaining power outages are likely due to ice storm damage to the distribution system. Some areas that were taken offline will also need to be restored manually, according to ERCOT. ERCOT warned that emergency conditions remain, and that “some level of rotating outages” may be necessary over the coming days to keep the grid stable. **Related** *How Texas’ power grid works* Who are the major players and how do they manage the power grid in Texas? Who is in charge of the state power grid? And who’s responsible when the lights go out? The deregulated power grid in Texas means no one company owns all the power plants, transmission lines and distribution networks, and about 60% of Texas customers choose between dozens of power retailers on an open market. Electricity generators, such as NRG and Vistra, produce power, while retail electric providers, such as Tara Energy and Griddy, sell it to residents and businesses. Transmission companies, such as Oncor, transport the power and are compensated by a fee on customer’s bills from their electric provider. But who is responsible when the power goes out?

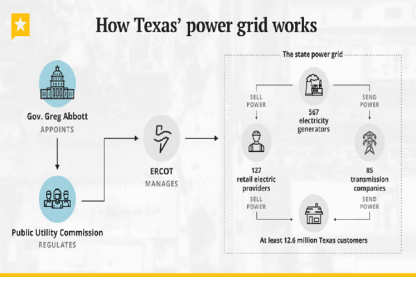


Illustration by Emily Albracht.

The Electric Reliability Council of Texas, an independent nonprofit, manages the price of power and also balances supply and demand in the grid, which ERCOT said was “seconds and minutes” away from catastrophic months-long blackouts during the mid-February winter storm that caused dayslong power outages for millions of Texans.

ERCOT is regulated by the state government. ERCOT and electric utilities answer to the state Public Utility Commission, whose board is appointed by Gov. Greg Abbott. And everyone answers to the Texas Legislature, which can write laws to regulate any part of the system. A Texas Tribune and ProPublica investigation found that Texas regulators and lawmakers knew about the grid’s vulnerabilities for years, but repeatedly prioritized the interests of large electricity providers rather than force expensive changes. (Courtesy texastribune.org)



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COMMUNITY

Wear Mask!

Over 15 Million Told To Boil
Water After Power Failure



Biden Declares Major Storm Disaster In Texas City workers and volunteers distribute bottled water at Delmar Stadium, in Houston, Texas, U.S., on Wednesday, Feb. 19, 2021.

KEY POINTS

The president’s declaration unlocks aid for individuals, grants for temporary housing and home repairs and low-cost loans to cover uninsured property losses.

Millions of Texans have struggled with power outages and more than half the state is experiencing disrupted water service.

Biden’s declaration makes aid available to individuals in 77 counties in Texas.

Republican Gov. Greg Abbott had requested a major disaster declaration for all 254 counties.

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

President Joe Biden has approved a major disaster declaration for Texas as the state grapples with widespread power outages and water shortages amid freezing winter conditions, the Federal Emergency Management Agency announced on Saturday. The action unlocks federal funding for individuals in Texas, grants for temporary housing and home repairs and low-cost loans to cover uninsured property losses. Millions of Texans have struggled with power outages and more than half the state is experiencing disrupted water service with boil-water notices in effect. Biden’s declaration makes aid available to individuals in 77 counties in Texas. Re-

publican Gov. Greg Abbott had requested a major disaster declaration for all 254 counties. The White House said it’s working closely with Abbott, and more counties could be included after further assessment of the damage. “I thank President Biden for his assistance as we respond to impacts of winter weather across our state,” Abbott said in a statement. “While this partial approval is an important first step, Texas will continue to work with our federal partners to ensure all eligible Texans have access to the relief they need.” Biden plans to visit Texas as soon as next week to assess the federal response.

The declaration also provides funding for cost-sharing with state and local governments and some private nonprofit organizations for emergency protective measures and hazard mitigation measures. Dozens of counties will be able to access the aid.



More than 15.1 million people are facing water disruptions on Saturday in Texas after freezing conditions disrupted more than 1,300 public water systems and led to boil water notices, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality said Saturday. The federal government has already approved emergency declarations for Texas, Oklahoma and Louisiana and has sent supplies like generators, blankets, water and meals to Texas last week. “This is great news for the people of Dallas after a horrible week,” Dallas Mayor Eric Johnson wrote in a tweet. “The damage caused by this storm is extensive, and the disaster declaration will help our city recover.”



A shopper walks past a bare shelf as people stock up on necessities at the H-E-B grocery store on February 18, 2021 in Austin, Texas. Joe Raedle | Getty Images News | Getty Images The Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT) said on Friday that it returned to normal conditions and restored power for millions of customers. More than

60,000 people in Texas still didn’t have power as of 4:00 p.m. ET Saturday, according to data from PowerOutage.us. The cold conditions caused energy usage and power prices to soar, which caused some Texas households to face electricity bills as high as \$10,000. Michael McCaul, R-Texas., said during an interview on CNN on Sunday that officials will use the disaster relief funding from the administration to help people hit with high bills.



Biden declares a major disaster in Texas.

Chief Nim Kidd of the Texas Division of Emergency Management said Saturday at a press briefing that bottled water distribution is still the number one priority. The state has ordered 9.9 million water bottles and has received a total of 5.5 million bottles. The military is delivering water and food by aircraft as utilities in the state work to restore water service. Roughly 156,000 people still have no water at all, Texas Commission on Environmental Quality Executive Director Toby Baker said Saturday. “I understand the public is extremely frustrated right now,” Baker said. In addition to the major disaster declaration, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency on Friday issued an emergency fuel waiver for Texas. The waiver, effective immediately, permits the state to temporarily forgo certain fuel standards to combat gas shortages in impacted areas. Texas refiners had paused roughly a fifth of the country’s oil production during the outages and freezing temperatures. Oil prices fell from recent highs on Friday as firms prepared to restart production as power services resume. (Courtesy CNBC.com)



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