

**Sen. Charles E. Schumer Remarks as Prepared for the NYS Association of Towns Annual Meeting  
Tuesday, February 16, 2021**

Good morning, everybody. It's so good to be here with all of you.

As you know, I never miss attending your annual meeting. This year is obviously a little different. But the fact that we're getting together virtually just goes to show you that nothing – NOTHING! – can stop New Yorkers from making progress on the issues that are important.

And that's what we're here to talk about today – the important issues that your towns have faced over this unprecedented year – and how a Democratic Senate, working together with President Joe Biden, can finally turn the corner on this pandemic and really kick-start our economic recovery.

But first, I want to thank your president, Rebecca Haines, from the great Town of Ellery, right on the lake in Chautauqua County. I also want to thank your executive director and my friend, Gerry Geist, from the Town of North Castle, for doing such a great job guiding this terrific association, together with everybody else on the executive committee.

This is my 23<sup>rd</sup> year as your senator and my 21<sup>st</sup> year speaking at the Association of Towns. That's no coincidence. Ever since the 1998 campaign – when my opponent, Al D'Amato, declared that New Yorkers would never see a Senator Chuck Schumer cross the Hudson – I have made it my mission to develop deep and lasting bonds with my constituents from every corner of New York State.

And when I became Senate Democratic Leader in 2016, I promised that my new responsibilities in Washington wouldn't take me away from my home state – that I would still visit every county of New York; that I would still criss-cross the state to speak at college and high school graduations; that I would continue to stay in touch with the real issues that matter to everyday folks.

And I'm proud to say that I've kept those promises – even in a pandemic!

Last year, thanks in large part to the tireless work of my staff, I still visited all 62 counties in the state at least once. I still spoke to New York's young graduates – albeit at virtual

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ceremonies – and I still met with thousands of New Yorkers. Just instead of meeting at parades and street fairs, or giving high-fives at road races, I saw people socially distanced or through computer screens.

A lot of my colleagues in Washington ask me why I continue to do these things. *“Why spend the weeknights and weekends attending dozens of Zoom events, when you could relax at home and re-charge for the week ahead?”*

The simple answer is that this DOES re-charge me.

In public service, it’s important to have a centering force; an internal gyroscope that keeps you on course while the stormy winds of politics buffet you from all sides. It’s easy to go to Washington and lose your sense of purpose; to forget why you even went into public service in the first place. There’s an inertia that draws people in and never lets them go.

For me, that centering force has always been New York – and all of the wonderful men and women I’ve met on my travels throughout the state.

Whenever I meet with my legislative staff to discuss a bill, my first question is always, *“How does this impact New York?”* I ask that question because New York is in my bones. It’s my anchor. It always comes back to New York.

**STATE AND LOCAL AID**

With that in mind, let me start by talking about the most important thing that I’m fighting to deliver for you right now in Washington, and that’s direct local aid.

I don’t need to tell anybody on this call just how hard this past year has been for New York, and our country. The worst public health crisis since the Spanish Flu pandemic. The worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. And an unprecedented attack on the U.S. Capitol, the worst assault on our democracy since perhaps the Civil War.

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The horrors of that day may have already faded for some, but as a country, we cannot simply move on. There can be no healing without truth and accountability.

So I'm glad that Americans had the opportunity to hear and examine the evidence in the recent impeachment trial outlining Donald Trump's role in the events of that horrible day.

But as I have said repeatedly in the past few weeks, the impeachment trial is but one of three priorities of the Democratic Senate Majority. The other two priorities are: first, confirming President Biden's cabinet nominations; and second, passing major legislation to rescue the American people from the continued effects of COVID-19.

As part of that legislative effort, I have written a provision in the relief bill pending in the House of Representatives right now that would provide DIRECT LOCAL AID to many towns across the state.

Once again, the reason why I recognize that direct local aid is such an important issue to all of you is because of this 20-plus-year working relationship that we have together. Over the course of that time, you all have shown me just how essential our towns are to the overall success of our state.

And that has been truer than now, during this health and economic crisis. The men and women who work for our towns respond to fires and burglaries; make sure our trash is collected; educate our children and grandchildren; and provide so many other essential services.

Every town in New York has had to step up your spending, ripping huge holes in your budgets and drawing from your reserves; while at the same time facing significant losses of revenue from enforced lockdowns and decreased consumer spending.

As a result, some of you have been forced to lay off workers and reduce critical services, and I don't need to tell you that many more cuts are on the way if we do not act immediately to get you the aid that you need.

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From the very start of this crisis, I have called for robust state and local aid.

And even though the previous Republican majority in the Senate refused to budge on this issue, I was able to secure – through the CARES Act and the most recent relief bill in December – tens of billions of dollars in direct state aid through various funding streams, such as:

- education funding for K-12 and higher education
- state-administered rental assistance
- flexible health funding for vaccine distribution, testing, and tracing
- money for transit agencies and airports
- FEMA disaster assistance
- Child Care and Development Block Grants

But so much more is needed.

Working together with my friend and colleague, Senator Gillibrand, I have introduced the DIRECT SUPPORT FOR COMMUNITIES ACT that lays out a formula for providing a direct allocation of federal assistance to localities.

Now that I am Majority Leader, I am making it a top priority to pass critical state and local fiscal assistance that uses this formula for direct local relief to get federal aid to municipalities of ALL SIZES. Let me tell you how it works:

The bill would provide \$350B for a new State and Local Coronavirus Relief Fund. 60 percent of the fund's assistance would go to the states, 40 percent to localities. Local governments of every size would receive dedicated allotments. These funds would be awarded directly from the U.S. Treasury within 60 days of enactment of the bill.

Eligible uses of the funds would be very flexible, from replacing lost, delayed, or decreased revenue as a result of the pandemic to helping rebuild local economies. That includes being able to use funds to help your small businesses and nonprofits, to support

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struggling industries like tourism, and to invest in economic recovery programs as we emerge from the health crisis.

As we continue to work on the bill, let me break down the numbers as they currently stand – with the obvious caveat that things could well alter somewhat as we work our way through the legislative process:

- States would receive \$195.3B
  - \$25.5B equally divided and \$169B based on the state share of total unemployed workers
  - New York State would get \$12.665B
  
- Local governments would receive \$130.2B
  - \$65.1B based on a modified Community Development Block Grant formula broken up the following way:
    - \$45.57B for municipalities with populations of at least 50,000
    - \$19.53B for municipalities with populations of less than 50,000, with allocation capped at 75 percent of the locality's most recent budget as of January 27, 2020
  - And also \$65.1B to counties based on population

For New York's local governments, this formula would deliver more than \$10.6B.

Crucially, THIS IS THE FIRST TIME that smaller communities – our towns and villages – would not need to compete with applications to the federal government or state to secure assistance. Instead, they would be entitled to funds that flow directly from the federal government to local communities using a formula allocation, with the state only serving as a pass-through.

In total, New York is expected to receive close to \$23.3B in direct state and local aid alone, and that's not counting the additional assistance we are working on for pressing needs in education, transportation, and more.

**LOOKING BACK – AND AHEAD – FOR COVID RELIEF**

Make no mistake about it – we need another large COVID relief bill. The last package was good, and it put money in the pockets of the people who needed it most, but it's not the end of the story. It cannot be the end of the story.

In the last package that passed in December, we were able to secure:

- \$600 direct payments to low- and middle-income individuals, that I am fighting to increase to \$2K now;
- An extension of expanded unemployment benefits worth \$300 extra dollars per week;
- \$69B to distribute vaccines and tests and other resources;
- \$88B in education funding for our K-12 public schools and universities;
- \$25B in rent relief and an extension of the eviction moratorium;
- \$10B for child care and \$7B for broadband access;
- A \$13B increase in SNAP funding for hungry families;
- \$2B to help reimburse low-income families for funeral costs;
- \$4B for our public transit agencies;

And of course, \$325B in small business and nonprofit relief, which included:

- \$284B for PPP first loans and a new second loan option
- Adjustments to PPP to provide larger forgivable loans to restaurants and hotels, and also simplified forgiveness
- \$15B for the Save Our Stages Act, which is a lifeline to independent venues, movie theaters, Broadway, and other live entertainment spaces that were the first to close and will be the last to reopen.
- \$15B set-aside for lending through CDFIs, MDIs, and micro-lenders and another \$15B set-aside for lending through small credit unions and banks to ensure the program reaches underserved and very small businesses
- \$20B for SBA EIDL Advance grants for hard-hit, underserved small businesses

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All together, this infusion of more than \$900B in relief should sustain economic activity – even at a reduced level – and help get us through the winter. Just like the CARES Act put money in the pockets of people who then used it to generate local economic activity and sales tax revenues, softening the blow to the Main Streets of your towns, so will the provisions of this bill.

But everywhere we look in the economy, there are still major warning signs. Economic output has still not returned to pre-pandemic levels. Jobless claims remain high. Millions of Americans are behind on rent, car and mortgage payments, student loan debt.

Two weeks ago, the Senate voted for a Budget Resolution that paved the way for Senate committees to begin crafting the next relief bill.

In my role as Majority Leader, I am doing everything in my power to shape that plan so that it benefits New York. Here are a few of the things I'm fighting for:

- State and Local – \$350B. As I discussed earlier, our localities will get a significant amount of this money to cover lost revenue.
- Education – \$170B. NYS should expect another round of funding even larger than the \$6B from December.
- Rental and Mortgage – \$20B and \$10B. New York State, NYC, and the counties would get another round of funding to build on the \$1.3B from December.
- Vaccines and Testing – NYS will get another large round of distribution and testing money. There is \$20B for vaccines and \$50B for testing
- Small Businesses:
  - \$25B direct grant relief for restaurants (based on the RESTAURANTS Act)
  - Expanded PPP eligibility for more nonprofits like YMCAs, Habitat for Humanity chapters, and Goodwills that have been left out so far due to the SBA's affiliation rule, which we are waiving
  - \$3B for EDA with a tourism and travel set-aside
  - More funding for Save Our Stages

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All told, it amounts to more than \$35B in direct aid for New York State (NOT including \$5.5B in direct aid for NYC alone).

**NEW YORK ROUND-UP**

Now, even though the past year was defined by the government's response to COVID, that doesn't mean my office wasn't also hard at work addressing all sorts of other issues facing towns across the state.

As you know, this pandemic hasn't put a hold on those other issues. In fact, in many cases, it has exacerbated them, and so we had to double and triple our efforts this year at getting things done.

When my office takes on these issues, we don't always succeed. But if you told me when I was first elected to the Senate that we would have such a high percentage of success, I wouldn't have believed you.

In that spirit, let's review some of last year's accomplishments:

**Long Island:**

Let's begin on Long Island.

For the Town of Oyster Bay, I was able to make more progress in my long-running campaign to secure accountability from the U.S. Navy to remediate the ever-expanding toxic Navy Grumman Plume. The plume is a 3,000+ acre mass of volatile organic compounds emanating from the former Naval Weapons Industrial Reserve Plant and Grumman facilities in Bethpage, which previously specialized in aviation, weapons and space exploration manufacturing. For twenty years, I have rolled this ball up the hill, and finally, just a few months ago, the Navy announced that they had developed a plan to construct extraction wells along the Southern State Parkway and intercept the plume before it reaches more communities like Massapequa and the Great South Bay.

For the Town of Brookhaven, I was able to deliver an historic \$2.6B federal investment to construct the world's first electron ion collider. This effort dates back to 2018, when I

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first urged the Department of Energy to construct a collider as a matter of national security. For the last few years in my role as Senate Democratic Leader, I worked to ensure that DOE had enough funding to advance this project, and once it reached the solicitation phase, I advocated ferociously for Brookhaven National Lab to win the contract on their incredible merits. I also helped secure their designation as a National Quantum Research Center, which unlocks access to \$625M in federal funding to advance cutting-edge information technologies.

Hudson Valley:

Moving up the state, next is the Hudson Valley.

In the Town of Kent, after learning from residents that bureaucratic hurdles could further delay the prompt cleanup of the local arsenic mine, I stepped in and contacted various state and federal agencies to secure \$5.8M in EPA funding to acquire at-risk properties and permanently relocate impacted residents at their request.

For the Town of New Windsor, I fought hard to push the Defense Department to finalize their site investigation of PFAS contamination at Stewart Air National Guard Base. This is the next critical step of the environmental remediation process, and I won't stop until it's completed.

In the Town of Hyde Park, which is home to 1,000s of acres of protected land and several national historic sites like the Roosevelt and Vanderbilt mansions, I secured \$30.4M in federal funding to finally address years of accumulated deferred maintenance. All of these sites are important not only to our nation's history and cultural heritage, but also the local economy, which relies in part on the steady flow of visiting tourists.

And in the Town of Cortlandt, I was able to secure \$3.2M in federal funds to help sustain economic activity in the wake of the Indian Point facility's closure. This funding came from a new program housed in the Economic Development Administration that I helped create to assist communities – like those surrounding Indian Point – offset the economic impacts of a shuttered nuclear power plant.

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Capital Region:

Next is the Capital Region.

Let's start with some news that's hot off the presses. Yesterday, the Defense Department announced their approval of a contract with GlobalFoundries in the Town of Malta to fabricate computer chips at their world-class semiconductor factory. I took my advocacy all the way to the newly-confirmed Secretary of Defense, Lloyd Austin, and I'm glad that they have heeded my call to expand their partnership with GlobalFoundries, which employs hundreds of people in Malta and the surrounding area.

For the Town of Waterford, I fought hard to help the Capital District Transportation Authority secure \$28M via the "New Starts" program to facilitate the creation of their brand-new "Blue Line" rapid bus service that connects Waterford all the way to south of Albany.

In the Town of Wilton, I pushed the National Park Service to finally designate the former cottage home of Ulysses S. Grant as a National Historic Landmark, which will open up new sources of potential funding to expand as a tourist destination.

And for the Town of Colonie and surrounding communities served by the Albany International Airport, I was able to secure \$20M in federal funding to help them weather an unprecedented drop in air travel due to the pandemic.

North Country:

Next is the North Country.

Earlier this year, I was able to secure \$4.5M in federal funding through the Northern Border Regional Commission's (NBRC) Economic & Infrastructure Development Investment Program to support projects in multiple rural communities.

For example, in the Town of Tupper Lake, the Development Authority of the North Country will use the federal funding to install 5.5 miles of fiber optic cable, create 3 new wireless hot-spots, and provide broadband access to 125 currently unconnected homes.

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In the Town of Essex, federal funding will support upgrades to an existing municipal water treatment plant, including a new filtration system to adequately meet seasonal water demands and drinking water standards.

And in the Town of North Elba, the North Country Community College will use this federal funding to develop a water and wastewater operator certification program to create trained applicants needed to fulfill the surplus of available water and wastewater operator positions for the North Country region.

Central New York:

Let's now turn to Central New York.

For the Town of Dewitt, I was able to secure \$7M for the local Saab factory to begin work on a new radar missile technology for U.S. Navy combat ships. Not only will this contract help bolster our nation's military readiness, but it will also repatriate at least 50 jobs from Switzerland.

And in the Town of Whitestown, after years of destructive flooding along Sauquoit Creek, I worked with local officials to secure \$20M from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service to buy out flood-prone properties that cost the local government millions of dollars. For local homeowners who have suffered immensely from this repetitive flooding, this funding will provide long-sought relief by helping them move to safer ground.

Southern Tier:

On to the Southern Tier.

For the Town of Big Flats, which is home to a Corning glass factory, I delivered \$204M to expand and accelerate their production of Valor® glass vials, which are an essential part of the COVID-19 vaccine supply chain. Corning's state-of-the-art Valor® glass is engineered to resist damage, prevent cracks, and includes a revolutionary coating that enables vials to speed through pharmaceutical filling lines. So not only is the Southern

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Tier now home to an integral part of our national effort to beat back the pandemic; employment is also projected to double at the Corning factory thanks to this federal investment.

Further north in the Town of Prattsburgh, I was able to secure close to \$750K in EDA funding and an additional \$200K in Appalachian Regional Commission funding to lay over 1,000 feet of new wastewater collection sewer lines, manholes, a pump station, and allow for further improvements to the local wastewater treatment facility's capacity. This much-needed project will secure sustainability for 11 existing businesses, support the creation of 15 new jobs, help retain 63 existing jobs, and hopefully encourage the re-occupancy of empty commercial space in Prattsburgh's Business District.

And for towns scattered across Steuben, Schuyler, Chemung Tompkins and Tioga counties, I was able to deliver \$1.5M in federal funding to revitalize the local broadband fiber network to increase connectivity, support business development and economic growth, and hopefully attract new jobs to the region.

Rochester / Finger Lakes:

Up next is Rochester and the Finger Lakes.

In the Town of Henrietta, I successfully pushed the company Plug Power to invest \$125M in building their brand-new, state-of-the-art "gigafactory" for hydrogen fuel cells, which will create a projected 375 jobs. Another company with a factory in Henrietta, L3Harris, also finalized a \$95M order of manpack radios from the government, as part of their \$12.7B contract with the U.S. Army that I helped secure several years ago.

For the Town of Sodus, where homes along Charles Point Bluff are at increasing risk of falling into the lake, I secured \$4.5M in federal funding to address the problem, and this summer, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers started work repairing the break wall.

And for the Towns of Italy and Jerusalem and Barrington and Torrey, I was able to secure \$10.3M through the USDA's ReConnect Program to bring broadband internet access to

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roughly 8,000 residents and nearly 3,000 households, farms, and local businesses across Yates County.

Western New York:

Last, but certainly not least, there is Western New York.

In the Town of Hamburg, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers finally finished their repair and reconstruction of the Athol Springs Break Wall along Route 5, which was funded via millions of dollars that I helped direct towards the project.

On the other side of Buffalo, in the Town of Lewiston, the federal government finally completed the upgrade and modernization of the Lewiston-Queenston Bridge Plaza after I spent years pushing them to prioritize it. This will cut down greatly on traffic and processing delays at the border crossing, which is essential to the local economy.

In the Town of Cheektowaga, I secured \$16M in Defense funding to help CUBRC, a defense contractor, to build out their state-of-the-art facilities and maintain our competitive advantage against Russia and China in performing hypervelocity weapons systems tests. CUBRC is the only facility in the country that has the capability to test weapons systems at high levels of complexity and velocity at full scale.

And for towns along Lake Chautauqua, such as Ellery, Ellicott, Busti, Ashville, and North Harmony, I was able to secure Army Corps funding to research harmful algal blooms, which limit the number of recreation days and weaken the local economy, especially during the summer tourism season.

**LOOKING TO THE FUTURE – INFRASTRUCTURE**

As you can tell from these stories, there's never any issue too big or too small. From algal blooms to state-of-the-art weapons systems to broken sewer lines, I care deeply about every single issue that your community is facing.

But if there's one fairly common theme, it's infrastructure.

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As many of you know, I have long been a proponent of doing a big infrastructure bill in Congress. That's one of the areas that I believe Republicans and Democrats can get along and do some good.

And I know how important it is to your towns. Whenever I speak to this group, or with the Association of Counties, or the U.S. Conference of Mayors, the number-one thing that comes up is infrastructure.

That's why one of the very first major initiatives that I undertook as the Senate Democratic Leader four years ago was to come up with a major infrastructure package worth \$1.5T in federal investment and 15M jobs.

Since then, I have expanded my vision to incorporate environmental sustainability and creating green jobs.

The reality is that we need to build "new" infrastructure – like expanded broadband, a modernized electric grid, more clean energy sources like wind turbines – in addition to repairing all of the old infrastructure like roads, railways, and airports.

That's why I recently introduced the THRIVE Agenda, which would center tackling climate change as a pillar of future economic growth and development policies, like wide-scale infrastructure construction.

As just one proof of this concept, I recently stood with environmental justice advocates to push the state to invest heavily in the South Brooklyn Marine Terminal to build wind turbines that will eventually provide clean energy to our grid.

It's the perfect marriage of improving our infrastructure, while also converting to cleaner energy and creating good, union construction and manufacturing jobs.

This sort of partnership can be replicated across the state and in every single community, and I look forward to working together with all of you to make it happen.

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As Senate Majority Leader, working together with President Biden and Transportation Secretary Buttigieg and Labor Secretary Marty Walsh, I will not rest until we take action on an infrastructure package and get our people back to work

**CONCLUSION**

My friends, let me conclude on a serious – but hopeful – note.

This is a time when many of us who have had complete faith in the political and economic institutions that have built America into the greatest country in human history are genuinely worried if it will endure.

But all of you, the public servants who keep our local towns running, give me solace that despite our current peril, the greatness of America will ultimately prevail.

My job will continue to call me back to Washington, but if there's one thing I want you to take away this morning, it's this:

As long as God breathes air into my lungs, I'll still visit every county in New York; I'll still regale college graduates with my jokes and stories; and I'll still keep coming back to you for ideas and suggestions on how to do better.

That's just how I do my job and I ain't changing now.

Thank you.