

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3203

October 4, 2021

Dear Colleague,

As I said during our caucus lunch on Thursday, we are at a pivotal moment in the 117th Congress. We are trying to pass historic legislation to help American families and strengthen our democracy with the slimmest possible Congressional majorities and a new Democratic President. Doing big things in the Congress is hard. Doing really big things all at once is really, really hard.

From the very beginning, we knew the execution of the two-track legislative strategy for the Bipartisan Infrastructure bill and the Build Back Better Act would be difficult and, at times, messy. On Friday, President Biden met with our colleagues in the House Democratic conference to discuss our path forward on these two important bills. He encouraged them to stick together, compromise, and find the sweet spot that will allow us to complete our work. I agree with his sentiment whole-heartedly – we can get this done, together, if we put aside our differences and find the common ground within our party. It will require sacrifice. Not every member will get everything he or she wanted. But at the end of the day, we will pass legislation that will dramatically improve the lives of the American people. I believe we are going to do just that in the month of October.

As you may know by now, the House and Senate quickly passed a 30-day extension of the expiring Highway infrastructure program on Friday and Saturday. The Bipartisan Infrastructure bill is also a 5-year reauthorization of the Highway Trust Fund, which means that our new legislative goal must be to enact that bill and the Build Back Better Act before the new expiration date at the end of October. Due to the time it will take the House and Senate committees to draft final legislation of a Reconciliation agreement and vet it with the Senate parliamentarian to ensure it maintains its “privileged” status in our chamber, it is crucial that the House, Senate and President come to a final agreement on the details of the Build Back Better Act as soon as possible, preferably within a matter of days, not weeks. I will be working with the Speaker and the President - and encourage all of you to help us – to reach that agreement expeditiously.

The other major challenge facing us this week is protecting the full faith and credit of the United States by extending the nation’s debt limit. As you know, our Republican colleagues have completely abdicated their responsibility to the nation by refusing to pay for the spending and debts incurred as a result of the bipartisan COVID relief legislation passed during the Trump Administration. Last week, Leader McConnell and Senate Republicans refused to take Yes for an answer: I asked Unanimous Consent to allow Senate Democrats to suspend the debt limit with a simple majority so Republicans could vote no, as Leader McConnell and his colleagues have repeatedly requested. This episode is a stark reminder how absurd and partisan Republicans have made the process for raising the debt limit.

Let me be clear about the task ahead of us: we must get a bill to the President's desk dealing with the debt limit by the end of the week. Period. We do not have the luxury of waiting until October 18th, as it is our responsibility to re-assure the world that the United States meets our obligations in a timely fashion and that the full faith and credit of the United States should never be in question. The consequences of even approaching the X date could be disastrous for our economy and devastating to American families, raising the costs of borrowing for average Americans and hampering our economic recovery over the long-term.

Please make sure you attend the Tuesday caucus lunch this week, as we will continue to discuss this important issue. Of course, if Leader McConnell and his colleagues continue to obstruct our ability to quickly resolve the debt issue, the Senate will likely be forced to remain in session over this weekend, and possibly through the recess, to finish our work. Please plan accordingly.

Finally, in the face of these daunting tasks, we must also continue our steadfast fight to protect free and fair elections. To that end, the Senate should be prepared to soon consider the Freedom to Vote Act, as well as soon-to-be introduced legislation to repair the Voting Rights Act. This may occur this work period or immediately at the start of the next.

We hope that all of our colleagues will join us in good faith in advancing solutions to ensure all Americans have their voice heard in their democracy.

Our democracy faces great challenges. We can demonstrate we can deliver results for the American people – and we will.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Charles Schumer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Charles E. Schumer
United States Senator