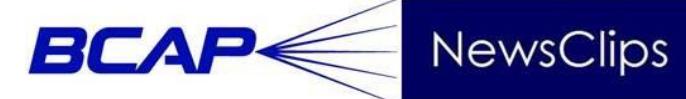


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Sen. Pat Toomey and several of his Republican colleagues unveiled a \$568 billion infrastructure plan Thursday in hopes of drawing Democrats into negotiations over President Joe Biden's \$2 trillion proposal. The plan focuses on traditional infrastructure needs such as roads, bridges, drinking water and rail while pledging funding into improving broadband, among other projects. However, it would strip out some of Mr. Biden's most ambitious proposals that don't align with what Americans traditionally associate with infrastructure spending.

Left on the cutting room floor were Mr. Biden's call to fund child care, tax breaks for people buying electric vehicles and efforts to renovate or rebuild public buildings with environmentally friendly components. "While President Biden wants to do all these things that have nothing to do with infrastructure, my view is we can have that discussion in some point in time, but what we ought to focus on is that which we seem to have agreement on," Mr. Toomey said.

The Republican plan would also shift how the country would pay for the infrastructure improvements. Mr. Biden intends to tax corporations, both by raising the corporate tax then-President Donald Trump lowered in 2017 and by penalizing companies that send American jobs overseas through a minimum tax. The Republican counterproposal would allow communities to spend unused COVID-19 relief money on transportation needs and create user fees on electric vehicles. The senators said they would also look to increase user fees, including making drivers of electric vehicles pay more. Raising the gas tax, they said, was not on the table. "Let's do this without taking on still more debt. We should do it without damaging the tax reforms of the best economy of my lifetime," Mr. Toomey said, praising Trump's tax cut.

Sens. Shelley Moore Capito, R-W.Va., and Roger Wicker, R-Miss., emphasized the proposal was a good faith offer to begin negotiations. Infrastructure bills have typically been conducted in a bipartisan manner, and the senators say they hope to continue that tradition. The proposal served as a starting point, and Ms. Capito anticipated that Democrats, if they engage in negotiations, would look to add environmental projects to the proposal. "This is the largest infrastructure package Republicans have come forward with. This is a robust

[Philadelphia Inquirer](#)
[Pennsylvania appears to have turned the corner on COVID-19 cases; vaccination rate in Trump counties falling behind](#)

[Pennlive Gov. Wolf says Pa. faces 'new reality' — a lack of people who want COVID-19 vaccine](#)

package," said Ms. Capito, the ranking Republican on the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee who led the group that crafted the GOP plan.

For its part, the White House said Thursday it saw the GOP proposal as a good-faith effort and planned to huddle with lawmakers and their staffs as the days ahead. Mr. Biden is also set to unveil his next major economic proposal, the American Families Plan, ahead of an address to Congress next week. It remains to be seen if congressional Democrats have any interest in negotiating. While Mr. Biden has expressed a desire to work in a bipartisan manner, Democrats narrowly control both chambers of Congress.

The plan unveiled Thursday was smaller than what Ms. Capito hinted at earlier in the week, and Democrats may not seriously consider a plan that is little more than a quarter of Mr. Biden's proposal. Funding sources could also sour Democrats on the Republican plan. During his announcement of his infrastructure plan, Mr. Biden noted that 91 Fortune 500 companies were able to use loopholes in the tax code to avoid paying any federal taxes.

Sen. Bob Casey, D-Pa., was among the Democrats quick to criticize the Republican plan. Cutting the unconventional aspects of Mr. Biden's plan, such as extra funding for home and community-based health care was a nonstarter, he said. "Senate Republicans need to go back to the drawing board and present a real offer. I won't be a part of any scheme that sells out our seniors and those with disabilities who have suffered disproportionately during the pandemic," Mr. Casey said. – ***Pittsburgh Post-Gazette***

Recognizing that many Americans rely on texting, U.S. regulators are weighing whether to require that phone companies allow people to text a suicide hotline. The Federal Communications Commission [last summer voted](#) to require a new "988" number for people to call to reach a suicide-prevention hotline. Phone companies have until July 2022 to implement it. Once it's in place, people will be able to dial 988 to seek help, similar to how 911 is used for emergencies.

Currently, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline uses a 10-digit number, 800-273-TALK (8255), which routes calls to about 170 crisis centers. Crisis counselors began responding to texts sent to the Lifeline last August, the FCC said. On Thursday, the agency voted unanimously to start a process that would also require phone companies to let people text 988. The agency noted the importance of texting for young people and those who are deaf, hard of hearing or have speech disabilities. "While a voice hotline has its benefits, traditional telephone calls are no longer native communications for many young people. Texting is where they turn first," said FCC Acting Chairwoman Jessica Rosenworcel in a statement. "So it's time to make the suicide prevention hotline text accessible with 988."

It's not clear when texting would be available for the 988 number. FCC rules often take months to complete. Suicide-prevention [experts have said](#) that the three-digit hotline could be a breakthrough that helps people in crisis. Suicide rates have largely been going up in the U.S. for the past two decades, although [they dropped last year during the pandemic](#). – ***Associated Press***

State Attorney General Josh Shapiro, a likely front-runner for governor, [has also been in favor of legalization](#) since 2019. And the Republican candidates? Clout heard mostly stony silence when we asked this week. This all falls on [the week of 4-20](#), slang for smoking pot that became an unofficial holiday date for those inclined to toke.

A [Muhlenberg College poll last week](#) makes clear the evolution of the issue and the ideological split it still provokes. Nearly three in five of the 421 Pennsylvanians polled last month support legalization, while 26% oppose it and the rest are unsure or have no opinion. That's a significant swing in eight years. A similar survey in 2013 found just a third in favor, with 40% opposed

and the rest unsure or holding no opinion. And the new poll mirrors results from [a Pew Research Center national survey](#) of 5,109 Americans released last week, which showed three in five support full legalization.

Strong majorities of Democrats (70%) and independents (57%) in the Muhlenberg poll support legalization. Republican opinion is split, with 43% in favor, 40% opposed, and the rest unsure or holding no opinion. Support drops as people age, with those 18 to 29 at 80% and those 65 or older at 35%. Two Republicans running for Senate, Sean Gale of Montgomery County and Everett Stern of Chester County, said they oppose full legalization. Stern said he used medical marijuana for pain after a car crash and supports that use.

Two doctors running as Democrats, [Montgomery County Commissioner](#) Val Arkoosh and [Pennsylvania Hospital emergency-room](#) physician Kevin Baumlin, back legalization. State Rep. Malcolm Kenyatta, a Philadelphia Democrat also running for the Senate, [voted for legalization in 2019](#). State Sen. Sharif Street, a Philadelphia Democrat exploring a Senate run, is [preparing to introduce bipartisan legislation for marijuana legalization](#). He is sensing shifts in opinions across the aisle that remind some of the swing toward support for legalizing casinos that passed in 2004. “This is a serious step for some of my Republican colleagues,” Street said.

He should know. He was 8 years old in 1983 when his uncle, T. Milton Street Sr., introduced legislation in the state Senate to legalize marijuana, pushing it as a cure to the state’s fiscal woes. The legislation, which never got serious consideration, was one factor opponents used to oust Street from the Senate the following year. “He was serious at the time,” Street said. “People thought he was kidding.”

State Rep. Brian Sims, a Center City Democrat, tells Clout he’s [all in on his campaign for lieutenant governor](#) next year and won’t seek a fifth term in the state House. That rumble you hear is a stampede of candidates who want to replace him [in the 182nd District](#), which stretches from Spring Garden to South Philadelphia. Party backing will be key, since 72% of the district’s voters are Democrats. Democratic Party chair Bob Brady said he expects Sims to back Deja Lynn Alvarez for the seat. He has already met with Alvarez, a public-health LGBTQ activist and in 2019 [the first transgender woman](#) to run for City Council. Alvarez told Clout she is “definitely interested” in the seat. “I have been having a lot of very interesting conversations that are going very well,” she said.

Brady said he also met with Jonathan Lovitz, senior vice president of the National LGBT Chamber of Commerce, who [announced his campaign](#) this week. Other potential Democratic contenders: former 182nd candidates Marisa Shaaban, a lobbyist who ran in 2020, and Ben Waxman, a political consultant and former state Senate staffer who ran in 2016.

Clout [last week detailed the first political ad](#) of the 2022 Senate race. [The Collective Super PAC](#) ad called out Fetterman for a 2013 incident when the then-Braddock mayor [held a shotgun while detaining a man](#) he saw running from what he said he suspected was a nearby shooting. The man turned out to be an unarmed Black jogger. The group aired that radio ad in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh.

Fetterman countered, airing a radio ad in both cities for a week, highlighting his work as chairman of the [state Board of Pardons](#). It’s narrated by Dennis and Lee Horton, [brothers from North Philadelphia](#) convicted in a 1993 robbery and murder, who have maintained their innocence. “We were just so grateful that somebody finally was trying to stand by us to help us fight,” the Horton brothers say in the ad. “Before that we were just invisible. And he just started going to work, trying to help us get out.” Gov. Tom Wolf [commuted their life sentences](#) in February. Fetterman [hired them last Friday](#) as campaign organizers. – **Chris Brennan’s “Clout” column in Philadelphia Daily News**



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