

## **What They're Saying: Senate Republicans Fail to Respond to the Coronavirus Crisis, Allow Americans to Lose Critical Lifelines**

*For nearly three months, Senate Republicans have obstructed passage of the Heroes Act, critical legislation passed by the House on May 15 that responds to the coronavirus crisis. While they have failed to provide relief to Americans, this crisis has worsened. Cases are surging, hospitals are overwhelmed, testing results are delayed, and millions of Americans are struggling to make ends meet. When Republicans finally put forward a proposal, it fell far short of what was needed and cut assistance that Americans need to get through this crisis. Now, Republicans' deep divisions continue to hold up negotiations. Here's a look at how that is playing out in the news:*

**New York Times Op-ed:** "In case you haven't noticed, the coronavirus is still very much with us. Around a thousand Americans are dying from Covid-19 each day, 10 times the rate in the European Union. Thanks to our failure to control the pandemic, we're still suffering from Great Depression levels of unemployment; a brief recovery driven by premature attempts to resume business as usual appears to have petered out as states pause or reverse their opening. Yet enhanced unemployment benefits, a crucial lifeline for tens of millions of Americans, have expired. And negotiations over how — or even whether — to restore aid appear to be stalled. You sometimes see headlines describing this crisis as a result of 'congressional dysfunction.' Such headlines reveal a severe case of bothsidesism — the almost pathological aversion of some in the media to placing blame where it belongs. For House Democrats passed a bill specifically designed to deal with this mess *two and a half months ago*. The Trump administration and Senate Republicans had plenty of time to propose an alternative. Instead, they didn't even focus on the issue until days before the benefits ended. **And even now they're refusing to offer anything that might significantly alleviate workers' plight. This is an astonishing failure of governance, right up there with the mishandling of the pandemic itself.**" [Paul Krugman, [8/4/20](#)]

**LA Times Editorial:** "At the moment, Congress has two tasks more important than any others: Providing the resources and leadership needed to defeat the COVID-19 pandemic, and helping the country climb out of the deep recession that the pandemic triggered. Sadly, the long-awaited coronavirus relief package that Senate Republicans released this week falls far short on both fronts. The need for a fourth major congressional effort became clear not long after states abandoned their stay-at-home orders, leading infection rates to skyrocket. The one thing lawmakers should have been able to agree on immediately is a major increase in funding for testing and contact tracing so that states could better identify where and how the disease was spreading. **But in addition to being many days late, Senate Republicans are coming to the table many dollars short on this front.** Its proposal includes \$16 billion for testing, compared to the \$75 billion recommended by a number of healthcare analysts and public health experts... Some Republicans have balked at the idea of providing any further federal aid because of the record-setting deficit. Such fiscal responsibility would have been more welcome when the economy was growing and the GOP was cutting taxes and throwing money at the Pentagon. **The human and economic problems caused by COVID-19 are enormous and ongoing, and they demand a commensurate response.**" [[8/28/20](#)]

**The Washington Post Editorial:** "The 31.8 million U.S. workers currently receiving unemployment insurance benefits need that help — and they need clarity about how much help they are going to get, and for how much longer. Too bad neither the Republican majority in the Senate nor the White House can get its act together to meet those needs, especially with a July 31 expiration date for a covid-19-related \$600-per-week supplement fast approaching. The GOP has proposed renewing the supplement at a lower level, \$200, through September, to be followed by a new system under which recipients get 70 percent of their previous wages, up to \$500 per week. Democrats want the \$600 per week to continue unchanged through the end of this year.... Perhaps it would help to recall that the \$600 supplement, like the March 27 Cares Act, of which it was a part, was actually a bipartisan measure. Democrats and Republicans agreed that workers being thrown out of their jobs because of the nationwide pandemic response should get the same weekly income they

had on the job... The GOP goal of 70 percent wage replacement retreats from this previous consensus, in the name of restoring work incentives, though it is better than the 45 percent that states typically provide. Democrats correctly respond that there is not yet much evidence of a negative impact on labor supply because of the \$600 supplement, largely because there are still so few jobs open.” [7/29/20]

**St. Louis Dispatch Editorial:** “Congress has known for months that a steep economic cliff was approaching for millions of Americans last week. Both a \$600 federal boost to unemployment benefits and a federal moratorium on evictions expired Friday. Meanwhile, state budgets across the nation are straining under the expense and diminished tax revenue of the pandemic. Testing systems nationwide are mired in long waits for results and lack of federal coordination. Countless small businesses, struggling for months, are going under for the last time. No one knows what to do about the approaching school year. All this as the coronavirus surges, threatening renewed shutdowns. **Yet the Republicans who control the White House and Senate waited until last week’s deadlines to start talking in earnest. Then they couldn’t reach agreement even among themselves on a new relief package before Friday — let alone negotiate with House Democrats who, unlike their GOP colleagues, got their act together months ago to pass such a package... This isn’t partisan gridlock. This is the Republican failure to lead that we’ve seen again and again in this crisis —** and the nation is about to start feeling it like never before... The GOP is only now meandering to the bargaining table — far too late for many of those who have long been headed for this clearly predicted cliff. Americans in November shouldn’t forget that this unacceptable dereliction of duty wasn’t bipartisan.” [07/26/20]

**Newark (NJ) Star Ledger Editorial:** “Congress should have one priority right now, and that is to ease the burden of Americans slammed hardest by the worst public health crisis and economic meltdown of our lifetime. But **right on cue, with enhanced jobless benefits for millions expiring on Friday, Mitch McConnell and his Republican Senate caucus proposed a relief package that can only be described as oblivious.** Their package cuts the federal unemployment stipend for laid-off workers from \$600 a month to \$200, and then allows it to lapse at the end of September. **Combined with the expiration of an eviction moratorium, it will sink millions of families deeper into economic despair.** Roughly 840,000 idled workers will lose the benefit in New Jersey alone. The Republicans’ \$1 trillion bill also contains no federal aid to state or local governments, no funds for election security, and offers a fraction of what experts say is needed for coronavirus testing and tracing, which are vital to reopening the economy. Here’s what it does include: Billions for fighter jets and other weaponry, \$1.75 billion for a new FBI building, and a full tax deduction for business lunches. When asked what these items have to do with COVID relief, Senate Appropriations Committee chairman Richard Shelby (R-Ala.) replied, ‘That’s a good question.’ **McConnell had 10 weeks to provide a reasonable counteroffer to the HEROES Act, which was passed by the House on May 15, has triple the money, and is actually designed to help. Instead, the Majority Leader insisted that the country didn’t need another stimulus, and now the economy is at DEFCON 1.**” [8/2/20]

**The Mercury News Editorial (San Jose, California):** “After two months of foot-dragging, Senate Republicans on Monday unveiled a heartless and irresponsible cut to weekly emergency unemployment benefits that demonstrates that they still don’t understand the gravity of the pandemic... **The paltry benefits Senate Republicans propose would leave millions of unemployed Americans unable to pay their bills. It would be great if we could get them all back to work, but, in large part due to the failure of the Trump administration, we still don’t have adequate testing capacity to safely do so.**” [07/28/20]

**The Minneapolis Star Tribune Editorial:** “Congress and the White House must compromise and coalesce on continuing aid for the millions of Americans facing economic calamity due to the coronavirus pandemic. The need is intense and immediate. Unemployment was at 11.1% in June, and last week’s data suggest that the grim conditions will continue. Second-quarter gross domestic product contracted at an annual 32.9% rate, and weekly jobless claims surged to 1.43 million. Just days after those bracing reports, the supplemental \$600 on top of standard unemployment benefits expired, as did the moratorium on most evictions. The lapsing of the legislation will exacerbate the concurrent unemployment and homelessness crises and threatens to accelerate the

*Office of Majority Leader Steny H. Hoyer, 08/05/20*

rapid contraction (if not permanent closure) of small businesses across the U.S. **In May, the House passed a broad-based \$3 trillion bill that includes an unemployment benefit extension, a new round of stimulus checks, aid to states and municipalities, and other items.** Meanwhile, the Republican-majority Senate has prioritized — but not passed — a \$1 trillion bill, with COVID-19 liability protection a red line for Majority Leader Mitch McConnell. **But so far GOP senators cannot find caucus agreement, let alone common ground with Democrats.”** [8/03/20]

**The New Yorker Op-ed:** “Even at this stage, though, one outcome is clear. **Trump’s abject mishandling of the pandemic has greatly increased the financial cost of dealing with it.** By botching the initial response, discouraging the use of masks, and encouraging many states to reopen too early, the President and his allies at the local level have created a situation in which the economy is now teetering on the edge of a renewed slump. Senator Ted Cruz and some of his G.O.P. colleagues can complain all they want about the federal government running up more red ink. **It’s Trump’s ghastly blundering that has given Congress no choice but to authorize another costly stimulus... As a result, the country is now faced with a tremendous human and financial cost. McConnell and the Republicans can’t avoid this harsh reality.”** [John Cassidy, 07/28/20]

**Vox:** “Republicans have long chafed at spending more money on stimulus, and this reluctance is apparent in the new bill... In the new bill, Republicans are pushing for a reduction in the expanded UI amount from \$600 per week to \$200 through September. Starting in October, their bill would change the sum of workers’ boosted and existing benefits to match 70 percent of their preexisting wages (up to a specific limit), a calculation that’s expected to prove challenging for states to make. **Experts warn that any alterations in expanded UI will be tough for states already overwhelmed by the surge in UI applications to execute.** ‘There will be states that can’t adjust in time and are unable to make pandemic unemployment payments for a couple of weeks while they reprogram their systems,’ UC Berkeley economics professor Jesse Rothstein tells Vox.” [7/27/20]