

Trump executive orders set stage for tens of millions of evictions

By Jacob Crosse
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On Saturday, President Donald Trump announced a series of constitutionally dubious executive actions at his exclusive golf resort in New Jersey that would, among other things, slash federal unemployment benefits by at least \$200 and fail to extend a partial federal moratorium on evictions.

The previous day, a comprehensive analysis by researchers at the Aspen Institute, based on data from the US Census Bureau and the National Low Income Housing Coalition, estimated that between 28,900,000 and 39,900,000 tenants in the US are at risk of eviction by the end of the year.

The authors warn that “if conditions do not change” and without “robust and swift intervention,” up to 43 percent of renter households will be at risk in the next several months. Since the start of the pandemic, 30 percent of renters have reported using government aid or other forms of assistance to pay rent, while another 30 percent expect to have to borrow cash or obtain a loan to pay September rent.

After two weeks of half-hearted negotiations and theatrics between Democratic congressional leaders and Trump administration officials, both sides adjourned Friday without reaching an agreement to extend the now-expired federal unemployment enhancement for the roughly 30 million Americans who had been receiving it. Nor did the two sides reach a deal to extend the federal partial moratorium on evictions, which, according to the Urban Institute, covered roughly 12.3 million people.

Speaking before wealthy supporters in a gilded ballroom at his private Westminster golf club, Trump claimed that his executive order on evictions “will solve that problem largely, hopefully completely.”

In fact, it will “largely” and “completely” do nothing to prevent the coming tsunami of evictions, nor those already in progress in cities such as Milwaukee, which saw 502 filings for the week of July 26, according to

EvictionLab.org. The executive order is nothing but a directive to federal agencies instructing them to “consider” whether a temporary halt on evictions is necessary.

Prior to the pandemic, millions of US workers and their families were already besieged by skyrocketing rental costs coupled with a dwindling supply of affordable housing and stagnant wages. The pandemic has further exposed the terminal rot of American capitalism and left millions on the brink of homelessness.

Researchers at the Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard University found that between 2012 and 2017 the number of available units renting for \$1,000 or more a month increased by five million, while the availability of low-cost units—that is, units renting for \$600 a month or less—declined by 3.1 million. Units offering rents between \$600 and \$999 also decreased by 450,000 over that same period.

At the same time, roughly 53 million workers in the US, according to the Brookings Institution, are deemed “low-wage workers,” with a median hourly wage of \$10.22. Nearly half of them, working in retail sales, food preparation, personal care, building cleaning, construction or driving, have been laid off during the pandemic or had their hours drastically reduced.

By July 2020, 50 million workers had applied for some sort of unemployment assistance, and 20 million renters reported living in households where someone had suffered a COVID-19-related job loss. Food pantry requests in some states have increased by as much as 2,000 percent (New Jersey), while 30 million have reported not having enough to eat.

Job losses have overwhelmed working class neighborhoods. The *New York Times* reported that unemployment rates in the South Side of Chicago, North Las Vegas, South Los Angeles, and certain New York City boroughs, which hovered around 10 percent prior to

the pandemic, have ballooned to more than 30 percent in the last four months.

Rental prices have continued to increase. Data compiled by Zumper.com, an online rental platform, found that nationally rent is up 0.7 percent on a year-to-date basis for a one-bedroom apartment, meaning the median rent for a one-bedroom apartment stands at \$1,233 a month. The rent for a two-bedroom apartment increased by exactly one percent, to \$1,493 a month.

In New York City, the average rent for a one bedroom unit, at \$2,840, remains unaffordable for the vast majority of human beings on the planet. The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to Chad, a college student and part-time cook for a private dining club in Manhattan. “When the quarantine started, we all got laid off,” he said.

Chad explained that he attempted to apply for unemployment benefits the day after he was laid off in mid-March. “The application itself—it was very difficult because you couldn’t sign on to the website,” he said. “And then, when you tried to call, they would just send you on an endless loop till they finally kicked you out, as in hang up on you.

“Press five to talk to this person, and then press eight to talk to that person. And they just kept doing that until it just kicks you out. You just have to keep trying. For weeks I didn’t get anything.”

After a month, Chad started receiving his state benefits, “200-some-odd dollars,” he said. Shortly thereafter he began to receive his federal supplement, bringing the weekly total to “about \$800, which is less than what I made, but being that there was nowhere to go I could just sit in the house and save money.

“When I had the stimulus plus the extra unemployment, I saved a lot of that money,” he continued. “I went to a real minimalist lifestyle. I didn’t spend anything extra. I just paid what I needed, and I stayed current on my bills.

“For the average New Yorker, [\$800 a week] is a bare minimum. If I wasn’t married, with another income in my household, I would be decimated right now.”

Without the \$600 federal enhancement, “my savings are going to dwindle,” said Chad. “For the last [two] weeks, I got \$200, so now covering my bills, the money that I saved up is slowly going to be depleted. When it gets below a certain amount, then I’m going to worry.”

Asked what he thought about the Democratic Party’s recent negotiations, Chad said, “I don’t think anybody’s doing anything. What I will say is that I don’t see any sense of urgency on the Democratic Party’s part. They’re good. They have free health care for life. All of them

make a good amount of money. So, they’re not hungry. They have nothing to worry about.”

He continued, “These lawmakers, they don’t know the struggles of an average person. And they’re sitting there arguing over giving people pennies. What did they give us, \$1,200 in April? How long does \$1,200 last an average person if you’ve got to worry about rent, food, and whatever? I think it’s laughable that they’re arguing about this.

“Another thing that I thought about: You’re forcing these kids to go back to school just so you can make the average working person go back to work. We live in a society where you have to gamble with your kid’s life just to make sure that they have a life.

“For example, I jog every morning. I pass by two or three daycare [centers] on my morning jog. I’m looking at these parents dropping their kids off at daycare just so they can go to work. That’s a shame that it has to be that way. You have an administration that’s so inept that they’re willing to gamble with the average working person’s life just to keep this economy going so rich people can still sit out in quarantine. That’s exactly what’s happening now.

“I consider myself one of the fortunate ones. I’m not rich by any means, but I’ve been able to get by. But ask me a month from now, ask me two months from now how that looks. I can guarantee you it’s going to look totally different. Once these costs start adding up, they will be more than the \$200 a week that I’m bringing in.

“This government in general, whether Democrat or Republican, nobody came up with a clear, concise way to deal with COVID-19. The Democrats are the ones saying, ‘Hey, it’s not us saying it.’ But I didn’t hear them propose anything that would help.

“We live in a real interesting time. We have other countries that dealt with it better, but then we have other countries that opened up but had to shut right back down, which is what we’re going to go through here. But I don’t know if we’re going to shut down. I think they’re just going to sit there and keep doing what they have been doing, pretending that it’s not happening.”

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