

After White House, Congress cut aid to unemployed, evictions and food lines spread across the US

By Jacob Crosse
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Less than two weeks after the White House and congressional Democrats allowed the \$600 weekly federal unemployment supplement to expire, slashing the income of some 30 million unemployed workers by 60-80 percent, evictions are already on the rise and food lines are growing by leaps and bounds across the United States.

In signing four executive actions on Saturday, President Donald Trump claimed that he had intervened to temporarily resume the unemployment benefit, although at a sharply reduced rate of \$300-\$400. He also said his unilateral action, bypassing Congress, would prevent a wave of evictions following the expiration of a partial moratorium at the end of July.

But it will be weeks or even months before jobless workers receive any of the promised money. Moreover, Trump's executive memorandum on rent failed to extend the expired ban on evictions or provide any rental assistance, setting the stage for a rapid growth in the ranks of the homeless.

A senior White House official confirmed to CBS News on Tuesday that there are currently no plans for congressional Democratic leaders, Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi and Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer, and White House negotiators, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, and White Chief of Staff Mark Meadows, to meet this week to discuss a fifth coronavirus relief bill. In fact, Meadows has already left Washington DC "for an unspecified amount of time," according to a *Washington Post* report Tuesday.

Under Trump's legally dubious executive orders, US states already slashing budgets and furloughing

workers in an attempt to make up for massive deficits incurred as a result of the pandemic are being asked to contribute an additional \$100 a week on top of whatever meager state unemployment benefit is being paid out. The federal government would then add a further \$300 a week.

In a letter released Monday in response to Trump's executive actions, the National Governors Association registered its "concern" over "the significant administrative burdens and costs this latest action would place on the states." The letter requests that Congress and the administration "get back to the negotiating table and come up with a workable solution."

Meanwhile, early data from across the country indicate that evictions have already begun en masse. In Florida, Republican Governor Ron DeSantis postured as a protector of renters when he announced he was extending the state moratorium on evictions for a month. However, the text of the order bars only "final actions" in eviction proceedings, and only if the tenant can prove that nonpayment of rent is due to the coronavirus.

In Duval County, Florida, court records for the first week of August show 219 eviction filings, the first full week since the federal moratorium expired.

In California, data collated by CalMatters show that more than 1,600 households have been evicted since March 4, when Democratic Governor Gavin Newsom first declared a state of emergency. The report notes that this figure is likely a drastic undercount due to the fact that sheriffs' departments in "14 counties did not respond to data requests," including Los Angeles County, which includes more than 10 million residents.

A recent report by the UCLA Luskin Institute on Inequality and Democracy estimated that up to 365,000 Los Angeles County renters could be facing eviction in the next month. This coincides with a separate study conducted by the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA), which found that as many as 120,000 households in Los Angeles County, including up to 184,000 children, will become homeless as evictions resume.

Food lines continue to stretch for miles in major cities across the country. On Tuesday, there were reports of 2,000 people lining up at a food bank in Queens, New York.

In Dallas, nearly 8,000 people lined up at dawn to collect donated food. The first people in line arrived three hours before the distribution began. Speaking to local NBC television affiliate WMBF, Pauletta Johnson said she wanted to get there early because “It helps feed the grandkids.” Johnson continued, “I don’t really have the money. I’m on a fixed income and I don’t have the money to buy some of the things that I need to get. So that’s why I’m here this morning.”

According to Feeding America, a national nonprofit food bank network, food banks distributed over 1.9 million meals from the beginning of March through the end of June. In March, food banks gave out 20 percent more food than average.

In addition to mass homelessness and growing hunger, the double-digit unemployment rate means that millions are now without health insurance. A new study by Zippia found that in the state of Michigan nearly 222,000 workers have lost their insurance since the start of the pandemic.

Nearly 100,000 people, or 11 percent of New Hampshire’s adult population, are now uninsured, according to a recent report from the National Center for Coverage Innovation. The same report found that the increase in uninsured Americans nationally surpassed any previously recorded annual increase.

The two big-business parties and the social class they represent are more than willing to sit back and let the working class bear the full brunt of the pandemic, as long as the stock market remains at near-record levels. Even after a dip at closing on Tuesday, the Dow Jones Industrial Average ended up at 27,791.44, only 1,300 points down from its mid-February high. Since the passage in late March of the CARES Act

multitrillion-dollar bailout of Wall Street, the Dow has risen by more than 30 percent.

The supposed “partisan gridlock” that has prevented the passage of a new stimulus bill and extension of the federal unemployment supplement is a fraud. The slashing or elimination of the financial lifeline for millions of working-class families, along with the reckless rush to reopen the schools, is part of the strategy of the ruling class to force workers back to work even as the pandemic rages out of control. It is a bipartisan strategy.

When it came to passing legislation to hand over trillions to the financial oligarchy, both parties joined hands and passed the CARES Act in record time, and by a near-unanimous vote. When Trump then launched the back-to-work campaign, Democratic governors and mayors complied and announced plans to reopen businesses and public venues, despite the failure to contain the pandemic and the absence of adequate testing and contact tracing. Now Democratic officials in states and cities across the country are working to reopen the schools despite the rise in infections and deaths that will inevitably follow.

But when it comes to a measly \$600 to enable laid-off workers to pay rent and put food on the table, the entire political system comes to a grinding halt. There is no mystery here: both parties are beholden to the oligarchy that rules America and do its bidding. *The author also recommends:* Trump’s illegal power grab and the specter of American Bonapartism [10 August 2020] White House, Congress combine to cut off supplemental unemployment benefits [8 August 2020]

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