

Historic US job losses continue with another 860,000 unemployment claims

By Jacob Crosse
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For the 26th straight week, US unemployment claims remain at levels unseen since the Great Depression as an estimated 860,000 people filed first-time jobless claims for the week ending September 12, according to the latest US Department of Labor report. An additional 658,737 Pandemic Unemployment Assistance claims were also recorded bringing the weekly total to over 1.5 million new claims.

In total, over 61,000,000 jobless claims have been filed in the last six months since COVID-19 lockdown measures and business closures were first mandated to slow the spread of the virus. Over 202,000 people in the US have died due to COVID-19 as of this writing after most of those measures were quickly abandoned at the insistence of the financial oligarchy. Of the over 22 million jobs lost since mid-March, less than half, approximately 10.5 million have “returned,” albeit for many workers at reduced hours and wages.

A July study published by the University of Chicago in conjunction with the nation’s largest payroll processor, ADP, found that from March through June, employers froze the wages of 58 percent of their workers, compared to 36 percent during the same period last year. An estimated 40 percent of the 18 million workers who reported that they were furloughed in April have returned to work, according to Gusto, another payroll processing company that services more than 100,000 small businesses in the US.

Of the roughly 7.2 million workers who have returned, Gusto reported that 29 percent have been brought back at a lower wage or with fewer hours. Speaking to *USA Today* on the figures, Sarah Gustafson, Gusto’s lead data scientist, remarked, “When they come back, it doesn’t mean they’re coming back to a rosy picture, they’re kind of getting a double whammy.” Even among workers who were not laid off or furloughed, Gusto data found 8.8 percent of all workers saw their hours reduced in August,

up nearly 3 percent compared to last year.

The Department of Labor reported that the national seasonally adjusted insured unemployment rate was an estimated 8.6 percent for the week ending September 5. However, several states and territories have double-digit unemployment rates, with Hawaii leading the country at 20.3 percent. This was followed by California, 17.3; Nevada, 15.6; New York, 15.0; Puerto Rico, 14.1; Louisiana, 13.6; Connecticut and Georgia at 11.9; District of Columbia, 11.3; and finally, Massachusetts at 11.0 percent.

The number of people receiving some form of unemployment assistance actually increased by nearly 100,000 last week, to 29,768,326. For comparison's sake, during the same week last year, only 1,498,917 people were receiving government assistance. Overall, the weekly unemployment claims report largely mirrored those of the last three weeks, since the department changed its formula for calculating claims, bringing the four-week average claim amount to just under one million a week at 912,000.

With job losses continuing, the \$600 federal unemployment aid long expired and no relief in sight, food lines are growing as hunger grips millions. In New York City, an estimated 2 million people are food insecure. Rosanna Robbins, director of food access and capacity at City Harvest, New York City’s largest food rescue organization, reflected on the ongoing crisis.

“It’s never been this tragic for such a sustained period of time. Since COVID hit, the numbers of people in line at food pantries and soup kitchens skyrocketed, and it’s not going down,” she told the Associated Press. “And so, I think for us it’s just adjusting to the fact that we expect there to be a real need for free food for a very long time to come.”

While millions of unemployed workers and their families are queuing in food lines, a report from the

Institute for Policy Studies found that from March 18 through September 4, the wealth of US billionaires increased by a whopping \$970 billion, “an increase of 32.9 percent over 24 weeks.” Jeff Bezos, CEO of Amazon, has seen his wealth increase from \$118 billion to over \$206.4 billion, while Tesla CEO Elon Musk’s wealth nearly quadrupled in the same time from \$24.6 billion to \$93.3 billion.

This is part of an international phenomena; according to data from *Forbes*, Canada’s richest 20 billionaires have seen their wealth increase by \$37 billion since March, with the average gaining nearly \$2 billion in the last six months. The Thomson family, which owns media outlets Thomson Reuters and the *Globe and Mail*, saw their wealth increase by an estimated \$8.8 billion. During that same time, 1.1 million workers in Canada lost their jobs while another 713,000 reported losing at least half, if not more, of their work hours due to the pandemic.

As the financial oligarchy gorges itself on trillions of dollars through the artificial inflation of the stock market by the influx of unlimited funds furnished via the Federal Reserve, millions of jobless and destitute workers are left with nothing while the Democrats and Republicans in Congress feign interest in “getting something done” in between extended recesses and half-hearted negotiations that have produced nothing in the last eight weeks.

While a few jobless workers have seen modest relief after President Donald Trump signed an executive memorandum on August 8 that created the Lost Wages Assistance (LWA) program, millions have yet to see anything.

The LWA directed the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to oversee distributing \$44 billion to jobless workers in the form of \$300 weekly payments, less than half what workers were receiving before. Only workers who had been receiving at least \$100 a week in unemployment benefits are eligible to receive the benefit.

Every single US state except for South Dakota applied for LWA payments with over \$30 billion already earmarked for distribution. For many states such as Alaska, which was approved by FEMA to begin sending payments on August 24, entirely new delivery systems needed to be developed, delaying payments for an estimated eight weeks. Meanwhile the unemployed in other states such as New Mexico, which has already distributed five weeks of payments, have already been cut off from the program.

While millions of workers have been left in the lurch as the US Congress, American Airlines CEO Doug Parker,

United Airlines CEO Scott Kirby and Southwest Airlines CEO Gary Kelly met with White House chief of Staff Mark Meadows on Thursday to demand another \$25 billion in federal aid before the end of the month. The airline companies have warned that without government aid, up to 36,000 workers could be furloughed, including 19,000 at American Airlines and 16,370 at United.

Despite unprecedented joblessness, and the threats of more layoffs coming, no relief package appears to be on the agenda for either party.

Instead, on Thursday the Democratic-controlled House passed a nonbinding resolution condemning “all forms of anti-Asian sentiment as related to COVID-19” in a 243-164 vote. This gave both parties an opportunity to blame the other party for not being sufficiently bellicose against China and Russia as each side took turns sabre rattling over foreign policy.

Jim Jordan (Republican-Ohio) voted against the resolution while falsely claiming that China and the World Health Organization lied to the United States about the severity of the coronavirus. Republican House minority leader Kevin McCarthy chastised Pelosi for being too focused on “impeaching the President” back in January, instead of “focusing on China.”

Pelosi responded: “In terms of China I take second place to no one in this body in my opposition to China for three decades. Sometimes I take pride in being called the most disliked American in China for my opposition to China...trying to stop their proliferation of weapons technology, of mass destruction, to rogue countries and those delivery systems.”

Pelosi continued, “I have been on it [China] every single day for over 30 years.” She then accused House Leader Kevin McCarthy of having “newly arrived at this issue, in order to deflect attention from the fact that the Russian’s trying to once again infiltrate and [unintelligible] the security of our elections. Whoever interferes with our elections must be dealt with. But all of the sudden it’s about China, instead of Russia. I think the American people should decide who the next president of the United States is, not Vladimir Putin.”

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