

Twelve million to lose unemployment benefits in December

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Without congressional action in the next month, over 12 million people will lose federal unemployment benefits provided in the CARES Act at the end of the year according to a new report. The sudden elimination of much-needed funds for millions of jobless workers portends a further collapse in the health, safety and well-being of millions of people and their families.

On Dec. 26, the day after Christmas, unemployment researchers Andrew Stettner and Elizabeth Pancotti with the Century Foundation estimate that 7.3 million workers will lose their benefits through the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) program, while 4.6 million workers will lose access to monies through the Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PEUC) program.

This is over half of the estimated 21.1 million people in the US currently on some form of unemployment compensation, according to the researchers, who also found that another 4.4 million people, the equivalent of roughly every person in the state of Kentucky, have already used up all of their benefits.

For the millions who already have used up their yearly benefits, and the thousands more that will join them in the coming weeks, having to wait until next year is no guarantee they will begin receiving payments again. Byzantine state unemployment systems across the country continue to confound and frustrate hundreds of thousands of workers who have yet to receive their due payments.

Both the PEUC and the PUA program were created with firm deadlines and restrictions in mind. The PEUC program was designed to provide up to an additional 13 weeks of payments to people who had already exhausted their state unemployment benefits, which in some states provide 26 weeks worth of payments, although several are less, with Georgia and Nevada

providing only 12 weeks.

The PUA program was designed for so-called “gig” or “contract” workers, such as Uber and Lyft drivers, or the self-employed, such as artists, musicians and other independent contract workers who are normally not eligible for unemployment benefits. This program is supposed to provide up to 39 weeks of payments, but for thousands of applicants, like Howard Booker in Las Vegas, months of trying to get what’s rightfully theirs has been frustrating and futile.

“I just want what’s mine, and I want them to give me my money,” Booker told a local reporter. After months of calling and reaching out to Nevada’s Department of Employee Training and Retention (DETR), Booker said he received a notice this month stating he was “disqualified from PUA” and that he actually owed money due to “overpayments.” Booker says he has yet to receive a “dime” from DETR.

Finally, there is the Lost Wages Assistance (LWA) program, which was created through an executive order by President Donald Trump that authorized the Federal Emergency Management Agency to spend up to \$44 billion from the Disaster Relief Fund in the form of \$300 payments. Every US state, except for South Dakota, applied for the program with nearly every state having already dispersed the available funds. As with the PEUC and PUA, the LWA program is slated to expire the final week of the year on Dec. 27.

These programs, along with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention federal eviction moratorium, are all that stands between millions of workers and homelessness and destitution. Despite the grave situation, which has led to miles-long food lines in cities across the country, Congress has yet to come to terms on a new relief package that would extend unemployment benefits and eviction moratoriums

indefinitely.

After a letter issued by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer to Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell on Tuesday predictably did nothing to further negotiations on another bill, Pelosi, who was re-elected by her peers on Wednesday to lead the Democratic caucus in Congress again, gave no indication on Wednesday that she and McConnell were any closer to finalizing a bill to stave off disaster.

In fact the opposite was confirmed: congressional aides with Pelosi and McConnell stated to the *Washington Post* that “no discussions” were taking place on another relief bill. Instead the two politicians were working separately on another “omnibus” bill to approve spending legislation which would avoid a potential government shutdown before the Dec. 11 deadline.

“We will pass an omnibus... We are on a good path to do that,” Pelosi said to reporters.

Why is it that after months of so-called “negotiations” the Democrats and Republicans are no closer to providing relief, something both Pelosi and McConnell have stated they agree on, but can pass funding for the US Postal Service or fast-track Trump’s judicial nominations?

It is not because, as Democratic Party politicians claim, they and their Republican colleagues are so far apart on principles and figures that no deal can be had. Both parties came together with unprecedented speed and unanimity in March of this year, as the Dow Jones Industrial Average was tanking 10,000 points following the first wave of the virus’ spread in the US, to pass the \$2.2 trillion CARES Act. With a 96–0 vote in the Senate and a near-unanimous voice vote in the House, the two parties of capital provided billions to giant corporations, the Catholic Church and Wall Street, while rescuing the stock market and the wealth portfolios of the ruling class.

No, the unwillingness on the part of the two parties to reach a deal is not a mistake, it is a definite class policy that is being implemented. It is part of the ongoing effort of the ruling class to offload the cost of the pandemic onto the back of the working class by blackmailing teachers and students into dangerous schools, so parents can go back to work and generate profits for the financial oligarchy. All the while the

Democrats and Republicans continue to feign disagreement and separation on a relief package, while exchanging fist-bumps and pleasantries as over 250,000 people in the US succumb to COVID-19.



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