

Biden drops minimum wage hike from COVID-19 relief bill

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Seizing on an advisory ruling Thursday by Senate parliamentarian Elizabeth MacDonough, President Joe Biden and the Democratic Party have effectively abandoned any effort to raise the federal minimum wage.

MacDonough ruled that incorporating the proposal to raise the minimum wage to \$15 as part of the Democratic COVID-19 relief bill would violate the so-called Byrd rule, which limits the type of provisions that can be included in bills passed under the budget reconciliation process. Biden and the Democratic leadership are seeking to move their \$1.9 trillion bill through Congress by means of the reconciliation process so that it can be passed by a simple majority in the Senate.

A budget reconciliation measure requires only a majority vote in the 100-member Senate, as opposed to a regular bill, which, as a practical matter, requires 60 votes in order to overcome a filibuster. With the Senate evenly split between the two parties, Vice President Kamala Harris would cast the deciding vote in the upper legislative chamber.

The Biden administration has seized on the parliamentarian's ruling as an excuse to drop the minimum wage hike from the relief bill. On Friday, the White House announced that Harris would not exercise her power to overrule the parliamentarian, making clear that the abandonment of one of Biden's major election campaign pledges is a matter of choice, not necessity.

Senate Budget Committee Chairman Bernie Sanders meekly accepted the White House climbdown, and his fellow so-called "progressive," Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, announced that she would vote in favor of a relief bill stripped of the minimum wage increase.

The dropping of the \$15 per hour minimum wage,

which would still leave millions of workers in poverty, is the latest demonstration that the Biden administration will be one of reaction, not reform. The brutal, bipartisan ruling class offensive against the working class is indicated by the failure to raise the federal minimum wage, presently at the near-starvation level of \$7.25 per hour, for 14 years.

As Biden and the Democratic Party are well aware, there is no way the Republican Party would supply the necessary votes to overcome a filibuster and pass a significant minimum wage increase under the regular procedure.

The exclusion of the proposal will affect some 27 million US workers making less than \$15 per hour, according to a report from the Congressional Budget Office. This is under conditions where millions of workers remain out of work, with some 10 million jobs yet to return since the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic last March.

Of the jobs that have returned, many are low-paying and temporary, leaving millions of workers and their families struggling to survive on poverty wages and forced to rely on charity, while facing eviction, utility shut-offs and crushing credit card debt in the midst of a pandemic that has claimed over 520,000 lives in the US.

The relief bill, including the \$15 minimum wage provision, is expected to be passed by the House on a party-line vote early Saturday. Any version passed by the Senate will exclude the minimum wage provision, setting the stage for a reconciliation process and a final bill that will leave out the minimum wage increase.

The Biden administration and the Democrats see passage of the relief bill largely as a means of providing political cover for their intensified drive to reopen the schools and businesses, a policy, demanded by big

business and the banks, that will lead to untold thousands of additional infections and deaths.

The bill includes a pitiful \$170 billion earmarked for schools, far short of what would be required to provide the level of ventilation and sanitation, as well as expansion of staff, needed to make the schools safe for in-person instruction.

There is nothing preventing Harris from ignoring the parliamentarian and moving forward with the bill, \$15 minimum wage included. Alternatively, the Democrats could replace the parliamentarian, as the Republicans did in 2001 when the official ruled against then-President George W. Bush's proposed tax cuts.

On Thursday, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said Biden was "disappointed in this outcome," but that he "respects the parliamentarian's decision and the Senate's process," and will "work with leaders in Congress to determine the best path forward..."

The same day, Biden said he was willing to "compromise" on a separate measure that would be lower than \$15 an hour. Democratic Arizona Senator Kyrsten Sinema has announced her opposition to increasing the minimum wage to \$15, while Democratic West Virginia Senator Joe Manchin has touted his support for an \$11 an hour minimum wage.

On Friday, White House National Economic Council Director Brian Deese told the *Washington Post* that "the vice president is not going to weigh in."

In fact, Biden already signaled his intention of dropping the minimum wage increase weeks ago. In a February 7 interview on "CBS Evening News," Biden said the wage increase as part of the relief package was "not going to occur."

CNN reported that an anonymous Biden administration official viewed the parliamentarian's ruling not as a negative, but as a positive development, which cleared "the way for the bill's passage in the Senate."

Workers disgusted by the latest capitulation by the Democrats registered their anger on social media. Twitter user @lockfoward4 wondered, "What was the point of all the effort in Georgia if the Dems are not going to take advantage of it?"

Another user with the ironic handle @russianbot3004 dryly remarked, "Respect the process more than the tens of millions [of] workers who would get a raise. Noted."

"Harris continues her long run of protecting the corrupt and rich and hurting the poor," @sistercrow remarked, while @ckroberts71 asked, "It's just so principled to keep people in poverty, isn't it @VP?"



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