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United-States: Donald Trump signs Covid-19 relief and spending bill - His delay in signing the bill has already allowed crucial unemployment aid programs to lapse

Monday 28 December 2020, by [HOLPUCH Amanda](#), [LUSCOMBE Richard](#) (Date first published: 28 December 2020).

Move comes after Republicans voiced anger over the delay, which resulted in millions of Americans losing unemployment aid.

Donald Trump has abruptly signed a \$900 billion Covid-19 relief and spending bill, ending days of drama over his refusal to accept the bipartisan deal that will deliver long-sought cash to businesses and individuals and avert a federal government shutdown.

Without the legislation, the government would have shut down on Tuesday and millions of Americans would have lost eviction protections and unemployment benefits. His delay in signing the bill has already allowed crucial unemployment aid programs to lapse.

Trump blindsided members of both parties and upended months of negotiations when he demanded last week that the package - already passed by the House and Senate by large margins and believed to have Trump's support - be revised to include larger relief checks and scaled-back spending [1].

But on Sunday night, while vacationing in Florida, Trump released a statement saying he had signed the bill, and it was his "responsibility to protect the people of our country from the economic devastation and hardship" caused by the coronavirus.

Signing the bill into law prevents another crisis of Trump's own creation and ends a standoff with his own party during the final days of his administration. It was unclear what, if anything, Trump accomplished with his delay, beyond angering all sides and empowering Democrats to continue their push for higher relief checks, which his own party opposes.

Trump had received the bill last Thursday and his decision to delay signing it allowed unemployment benefits for millions of Americans to expire. The lapsed benefits will not restart until the first week of January.

In the statement, Trump said he would still send a "redlined" version of the bill to Congress highlighting changes he wanted to the legislation. There is no indication Congress plans to act on these changes, in part because Trump's presidency ends in a few weeks.

Trump ended the statement by saying "much more money is coming," although he provided nothing to back this promise.

Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell welcomed Trump's signing of the bill. "I am glad the

American people will receive this much-needed assistance as our nation continues battling this pandemic," the Kentucky Republican said.

Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said it was a "downpayment on what is needed" adding: "Now, the president must immediately call on congressional Republicans to end their obstruction and to join him and Democrats in support of our stand-alone legislation to increase direct payment checks to \$2,000."

Democratic lawmakers, who have a majority in the House of Representatives and have long wanted \$2,000 relief checks, hope to use a rare point of agreement with Trump to advance the proposal - or at least put Republicans on record against it - in a vote on Monday afternoon.

It was not immediately clear why Trump changed his mind as his resistance to the massive legislative package promised a chaotic final stretch of his presidency.

White House officials have been tight-lipped about Trump's thinking but a source familiar with the situation cited by Reuters said that some advisers had urged him to relent because they did not see the point of refusing.

Republican officials were relieved that Trump had backed away from his veiled veto threat, saying it should help Republican Senate candidates David Perdue and Kelly Loeffler in the Georgia runoff elections on 5 January that will determine control of the Senate.

Republican representative Adam Kinzinger of Illinois said too much was at stake for Trump to "play this old switcheroo game".

"I don't get the point," he said. "I don't understand what's being done, why, unless it's just to create chaos and show power and be upset because you lost the election."

Washington had been reeling since Trump turned on the deal, without warning, after it had won sweeping approval in both houses of Congress and after the White House had assured Republican leaders that Trump would support it.

The bill laid unsigned on his desk since Christmas Day as the president, who was mostly silent through weeks of intense negotiations, spent the weekend at the Trump International Golf Course in West Palm Beach.

Instead, he assailed the bill's plan to provide \$600 Covid-19 relief checks to most Americans - insisting it should be \$2,000 - and took issue with spending included in an attached \$1.4 trillion government funding bill to keep the federal government operating through September.

And already, his opposition has had consequences, as two federal programs providing unemployment aid expired on Saturday.

Lauren Bauer of the Brookings Institution had calculated that at least 11 million people would lose aid immediately as a result of Trump's failure to sign the legislation; millions more would exhaust other unemployment benefits within weeks.

How and when people are affected by the lapse depends on the state they live in, the program they are relying on and when they applied for benefits.

In some states, people on regular unemployment insurance will continue to receive payments under a program that extends benefits when the jobless rate surpassed a certain threshold, said Andrew

Stettner, an unemployment insurance expert and senior fellow at the Century Foundation think tank.

About 9.5 million people, however, had been relying on the pandemic unemployment assistance program that expired altogether Saturday. That program made unemployment insurance available to freelancers, gig workers and others normally not eligible. After receiving their last checks, those recipients will not be able to file for more aid, Stettner said.

Joe Biden, who won November's presidential election and who will be sworn in as Trump's successor on 20 January, accused him of an "abdication of responsibility" in a statement on Saturday [2].

The relief bill wrangles come as the coronavirus pandemic continues to worsen in the US, with medical experts joining Biden in predicting that the darkest days lay ahead.

"We very well might see a post-seasonal, in the sense of Christmas, New Year, surge," Dr Anthony Fauci, the US head of infectious diseases, told CNN on Sunday.

Amanda Holpuch in New York and agencies
@holpuch

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<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/dec/28/donald-trump-signs-covid-19-relief-and-spending-bill>

Millions lose benefits as Trump refuses to sign Covid relief package

11 million people will lose aid from expiration of unemployment programs as Trump heads to the golf course instead of signing bill.

Donald Trump plays golf at the Trump International Golf Club in West Palm Beach, Florida, on Sunday.

Millions of Americans battling the financial hardships of the coronavirus pandemic lost their unemployment benefits on Sunday as Donald Trump continued to refuse to sign a relief package agreed in Congress and headed instead to the golf course.

The president's belligerence over the bipartisan Covid relief and spending bill, that would have extended the benefits and given direct cash payments to most American families, drew the ire of senior Republicans, who accused Trump of inflicting more misery on citizens.

"He should have weighed in eight months ago," Larry Hogan, the governor of Maryland, said on CNN's State of the Union in response to Trump's claim that he would only sign if the relief package included \$2,000 in direct payments instead of the \$600 agreed.

"The paycheck protection plan ran out in July. Tomorrow, unemployment benefits run out. So sign the bill, get it done. And then, if the president wants to push for more, let's get that done too."

In a later appearance on ABC's This Week, Hogan asserted: "Millions of Americans are going to suffer."

Trump, who is spending the Christmas and New Year holiday at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida, raised objections to the \$900bn relief bill only after it was passed by Congress last week, having been negotiated by his own treasury secretary Steven Mnuchin.

The bill has lain unsigned on his desk since Christmas Day as the president, who was mostly silent through weeks of intense negotiations, spent the weekend at the Trump International Golf Course in West Palm Beach.

In a tweet criticizing the bill, Trump claimed, without clarification, that it was stuffed with “billions of dollars in pork”.

Meanwhile Joe Biden, who won November’s presidential election and who will be sworn in as Trump’s successor on 20 January, accused him of an “abdication of responsibility” in a statement on Saturday.

Democrats in the House of Representatives will try again on Monday to break the impasse by voting to increase the amount of the direct payments, a move thwarted once already by House Republicans on Christmas Eve.

“On Monday we will hold a recorded vote on our stand-alone bill to increase economic impact payments to \$2,000,” Nancy Pelosi, the Democratic House speaker, said in a statement after the first attempt failed.

“To vote against this bill is to deny the financial hardship that families face and to deny them the relief they need.”

As well as denying help to long suffering Americans, Trump’s refusal to sign the package also holds up a connected \$1.4tn funding bill, which could result in a US government shutdown as early as Tuesday, in the midst of a deadly pandemic that has killed more than 332,000 in the US.

Financial experts say the burden on American families will worsen. Lauren Bauer, a fellow in economic studies at the Brookings Institution, has calculated that 11 million people will lose aid immediately from the expiration of two unemployment programs, and millions more will exhaust other unemployment benefits within weeks.

Andrew Stettner, an unemployment insurance expert and senior fellow at the Century Foundation think tank, said the number may be closer to 14 million because joblessness has spiked since late November.

“All these folks and their families will suffer if Trump doesn’t sign the damn bill,” Heidi Shierholz, director of policy at the liberal Economic Policy Institute, said in a tweet.

About 9.5 million people have been relying on the pandemic unemployment assistance program that expired Sunday. That program made unemployment insurance available to freelancers, gig workers and others who were normally not eligible.

Even if Trump relents, the expiration of the programs will cause delays in processing retrospective payments, adding to the financial burden for many.

Hogan, on ABC’s This Week, predicted that more Republicans were willing to stand up to Trump over the relief bill, aware that the end of his administration and Biden’s inauguration was only 24 days away.

“I think more and more are, and will,” he said. “It’s going to be a lot different after 20 January when he’s not in the position to exert such influence as he does now.”

The relief bill wrangles come as the coronavirus pandemic continues to worsen in the US, with medical experts joining Biden in predicting that the darkest days lay ahead.

“We very well might see a post-seasonal, in the sense of Christmas, New Year, surge,” Dr Anthony Fauci, the US head of infectious diseases, told CNN on Sunday.

“When you’re dealing with a baseline of 200,000 new cases a day and about 2,000 deaths per day, with the hospitalizations over 120,000, we’re really at a very critical point. You see people at airports crowded in lines, trying to stay physically separated, but it’s so difficult to do that.

“And that generally is followed, when people get to the destination they want to be, that you’re going to have mixing of household people at a dinner or at a social function. As much as we advise against it, nonetheless it happens.”

Richard Luscombe
@richlusc

Associated Press contributed to this report

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[1] <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/dec/24/donald-trump-covid-relief-bill-republicans-democrats-biden>

[2] <https://buildbackbetter.gov/press-releases/statement-by-president-elect-joe-biden-on-the-need-to-sign-the-covid-19-economic-relief-bill/>