



# AFL-CIO

AMERICA'S UNIONS

**American Federation  
of Labor and  
Congress of Industrial  
Organizations**

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September 21, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Minority Leader  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer  
Democratic Leader  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader McCarthy, Majority Leader McConnell, and Leader Schumer:

On behalf of the American labor movement, I implore you once again to pass an economic, pension, and health relief package that our country and working people urgently need. While we appreciate any effort to find common ground on the next Covid-19 package, we believe the recent proposal by the House Problem Solvers Caucus falls short of meeting the needs of the American people and should not be the focus of further negotiations.

The Problem Solvers Caucus proposal falls far short in a number of areas. It does not provide adequate relief to the millions of Americans facing unemployment, food insecurity and evictions. It would allow OSHA to continue avoiding its responsibility to protect workers by leaving out any requirement that it adopt an emergency infectious disease standard. It uses money that has already been allocated to inflate the amount of relief it provides state and local governments struggling to keep up the health care, safety and education needs of our fellow citizens. It fails to provide emergency assistance to the airline industry which will soon be forced to lay off hundreds of thousands of workers. Finally, the Problem Solvers proposal strands over a million hard working Americans who are depending on multi-employer pensions whose funding has been severely undermined by the economic fallout of the pandemic.

By contrast, the American labor movement strongly supports the HEROES Act as originally passed by the House, as well as additional relief targeted to the transportation sector.

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The airline worker payroll support program expires at the end of this month, and an extension is critical. Without it, hundreds of thousands of workers will be laid off, perhaps permanently.

It has been nearly four months since the House of Representatives passed the HEROES Act to protect workers from COVID-19 disease and continue assistance for the unemployed, small businesses, pension plans, the Postal Service, and state and local governments.

After these four months of unnecessary delay, many of the people once hailed as “essential workers” now face losing everything: their jobs, their homes and, unbelievably, their access to health care during a pandemic. Already, twelve million people have lost their job-based health insurance and—without the COBRA subsidies provided by the HEROES Act—face financial hardship in obtaining care.

Moreover, hundreds of thousands of workers and their families have paid for congressional inaction with their health and thousands more with their lives because they do not have strong, workplace safety protections. Eight months into the pandemic, workers are still without adequate personal protective equipment, and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration has still not issued an emergency COVID-19 safety standard to protect workers.

Ending federal assistance to the unemployed has been devastating for the millions of families who lost their economic lifeline. Failing to extend the program will put 5 million more jobs at risk over the next year.

To date, more than one million state and local government employees have been laid off and the critical services they provide, from keeping our communities safe to educating our children, are in jeopardy. Schools are reopening without regard to the safety of the students, teachers and other school employees. Even the U.S. Postal Service, on which millions of Americans, and especially our veterans, rely on for life saving medicines and other necessary supplies, is facing insolvency.

Absent legislative action, the retirement income security of more than a million and half hard-working Americans who participate in multiemployer pension plans will evaporate. The current recession has put even previously healthy plans in jeopardy--massive unemployment means a loss of plan contributions--and it is unclear how long this crisis will last, what employment levels will be once it is over, or how many employers will survive.

For many months now, workers have been facing economic uncertainty every single day, not knowing if or when they may be told to stop coming to work. Through it all, they have continued to show up to do their jobs because they know that our nation counts on them. In both the public sector and the private sector, everywhere from hospitals to grocery stores, working people are putting themselves at risk for the benefit of our greater good. Working people have borne the brunt of this crisis.

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We understand that Speaker Pelosi has already proposed to enact all the elements of the HEROES Act, while providing funding for a shorter time period and therefore with a lower budgetary cost. We urge all parties to seriously consider this proposal. It would be simply devastating to close this session without enacting the substantial relief contained in the HEROES Act.

For all these reasons, the American labor movement urges you in the strongest possible terms to honor the sacrifice of American workers and pass that legislation, with provisions to address the crisis in the transportation sector, during this work session.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard L. Trumka". The signature is stylized and includes a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Richard L. Trumka  
President

RLT/BS/sdw  
opeiu#2, afl-cio