



[U.S. Lawmakers and White House Officials Begin Talks on New Coronavirus Aid Legislation](#)

Federal lawmakers and White House officials began deliberations this week on a new round of coronavirus aid legislation. The talks on Capitol Hill come as the number of COVID-19 cases and fatalities continue to surge across the country. Congress has until the end of the month to agree on another relief bill before assistance runs out for the tens of millions of Americans who have lost their jobs due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. Any proposed legislation package will have to clear both the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives and the Republican-held Senate. After separate meetings with White House officials, Democratic and Republican lawmakers had not yet united on a proposal, however Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin stated that the talks were productive and that he hoped for agreement by the end of next week.

Mnuchin and White House chief of staff Mark Meadows spent much of Tuesday discussing priorities for the new legislation with lawmakers, first with Senate Republicans and then with Congressional Democrats. Mnuchin and Meadows have set an unofficial deadline of July 31st to pass this latest round of aid. In addition to the crucial end-of-July milestone for unemployed Americans, a planned Congressional recess for the entire month of August puts even more pressure on lawmakers and White House officials to agree upon something before the beginning of next month. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has stated that she would delay her chamber's month at home to ensure passage of a new bill, but it is unclear whether Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell would do the same thing in the Senate.

President Trump has called for the new legislation to include a temporary end to the payroll tax on workers' salaries that would benefit those who still have a job, but not the tens of millions out of work who currently have no paychecks to tax. However, federal lawmakers from both parties have shown little interest in the president's payroll tax cut proposal. According to McConnell, Republicans are focused on funding to return schoolchildren to in-person classes and new rounds of financial aid to address the historic levels of unemployment. Meanwhile, Democrats aim to extend the \$600-a-week federal boost to state unemployment benefits until the end of 2020 and provide more aid for state and local governments to deal with the coronavirus crisis. Previously, the White House had also threatened to upstage the negotiations by pushing for the elimination of billions of dollars for coronavirus testing, however Mnuchin stressed that the Trump administration wanted "to make sure there's plenty of money for testing...and that's a big priority." Both Republican and Democratic leaders view funds for increased testing as a vital component of the potential legislation.

Ultimately, federal lawmakers, in collaboration with White House officials, face pressure to enact a new relief package before the end of this month. To do so, Republicans and Democrats will have to compromise on several key issues including unemployment benefits, rent and mortgage assistance, liability protections for businesses, direct payments to Americans, and aid to local and state governments.