Legislative Update: Congressional Coronavirus Relief Package

Summary

After successfully passing two phases of coronavirus (COVID-19) relief legislation, Congress is working on a third phase. Senator Mitch McConnell (R-KY) introduced comprehensive legislation designed to mitigate the economic fallout. Democrats were quick to demand changes. Negotiations continue, but Senator McConnell has said Senators will not leave DC until the bill is complete.

Below is a summary and additional details about COVID-19 relief legislation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Bill Number</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Overview</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>H.R. 6074</td>
<td>Signed into law</td>
<td>$8.3 billion dedicated to research and development for a coronavirus vaccine</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>H.R. 6201</td>
<td>Signed into law</td>
<td>Provides USDA with $1 billion for nutrition and food assistance programs</td>
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<td>Extends paid leave and unemployment benefits to U.S. workers</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>$100+ billion in spending</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>TBD</td>
<td>Introduced in Senate</td>
<td>Economic stimulus package expected to inject nearly $1 trillion of stimulus into the U.S. economy</td>
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<td>A separate request from the White House also asks Congress to provide additional funds to support USDA and FDA operations</td>
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Phase Two Details: H.R. 6201 - Families First Coronavirus Response Act

USDA Food and Nutrition Programs

- Provides $1 billion in funding to USDA for nutrition and food assistance programs:
$500 million for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC);

$400 million for the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP); and

$100 million in nutrition assistance grants for U.S. territories.

- The bill gives USDA authority to continue operating food assistance and nutrition programs during school closures.
  - States and eligible service providers can request waivers for specific provisions of nutrition and food assistance programs.
  - The Secretary of Agriculture may also establish a blanket waiver. In that case, states only need to elect to be subject to the waiver (further application is not necessary).
  - After one year, states using a waiver are obligated to report on how the waiver was used in their state.

- The bill also suspends work requirements for SNAP and allows states to request waivers to provide certain emergency SNAP benefits.

**Leave and Unemployment Benefits**

- The bill establishes a paid leave benefits program to provide payments to employees taking unpaid leave due to the coronavirus outbreak.
  - First ten days of leave can be unpaid, but subsequent days must be paid leave (at least two-thirds of normal, daily salary; limited to $10K total).

- Requires employers to pay sick leave to employees who cannot work due to COVID19-related issues.

- Authorizes the Department of Labor to contribute additional funds to the Unemployment Trust Fund used by states.

**Phase Three Details**

*Economic Stimulus Package*


- Democrats are already calling for changes to the bill, setting up a round of negotiations with Senator McConnell and the White House.

- Provisions of the bill are focused on minimizing economic fallout stemming from the coronavirus, including:
- **Direct cash payments**: Direct payments of up to $1,200 are available for individuals with less than $75,000 in annual income. Payment amounts decrease for individuals making over $75,000, and completely phase out for individuals earning over $99,000.

- **Small business loans**: Businesses with fewer than 500 employees can apply for fee-free loans of up to $10 million that could help cover payroll, employee salaries, mortgages, rent and some other debt obligations.
  - **Note**: Farmers and ranchers are not eligible for the loan, but farm-dependent businesses are. The process for accessing these funds can be found here.

- **Industry-specific loans**: The bill includes $208 billion in loan guarantees for industries that struggle due the coronavirus. Targeted sectors include airlines ($50 billion) and cargo carriers ($8 billion).

- **Tax deadline**: Moves filing deadline from April 15th to July 15th.

- **Priority zoonotic animal drugs**: Allows FDA to expedite the review of new zoonotic animal drugs for conditions that may benefit human health.

**Additional Funding for Agency Operations**

- The White House is asking Congress to provide an additional $161 million in funding for USDA to make up for lost user fees and other expenses.
  - USDA would also like the authority to extend the repayment period on FSA loans.
- An additional $80 million is requested to support the FDA’s operational needs related to coronavirus response.