



Senate Advances Bill to Continue Federal Unemployment Benefits

In the Senate this morning, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (shown, D-Nev.) held a test [vote](#) which narrowly passed to advance a bill to extend long-term federal unemployment benefits, with Democrats refusing to compromise and pressing for the vote, and Republicans accusing them of playing politics.

The 60-37 vote clears a major hurdle in the Senate to limit debate and advance the bill. 60 votes were needed to push the bill forward.

Fox News reports, "At issue was a complicated system that provides as much as 47 weeks of federally-funded benefits, which begin after state benefits, usually 26 weeks in duration, are exhausted." The federal unemployment benefits had expired December 28, and will resume assuming the bill is passed and signed by the president.

"Today, I think we have given a bit of hope to millions of Americans, who are struggling in a difficult economy to find jobs, who are struggling to provide sustenance to their families," Senator Jack Reed (D-R.I.) said after the vote.

Six Republicans joined the Democrats in Tuesday's vote: Kelly Ayotte of New Hampshire, Dan Coats of Indiana, Susan Collins of Maine, Dean Heller of Nevada, Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, and Rob Portman of Ohio — but the majority of Republicans asserted that the Democrats were guilty of political posturing.

"It is transparent that this is a political exercise, not a real effort to try to fix the problem," declared Senator John Cornyn (R-Texas).

The bill as it currently stands would restore between 14 and 47 weeks of federal unemployment benefits, approximately \$256 a week for an estimated 1.3 million long-term jobless who had been affected by the program's expiration.

According to Fox News, "Backers of the extension still need to clear several additional votes in the Senate, before the GOP-controlled House can even consider it. House Democratic Whip Steny Hoyer, of Maryland, voiced hope that the Senate could pressure the House to act on the bill."

In [remarks](#) on the Senate floor just before Tuesday's vote, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid stated that a recent wave of positive economic news doesn't "match the darker reality" of the lives of millions. "They sit at the kitchen table, if they're lucky and have a kitchen table to sit [at]. They're juggling bills." Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) retorted, "Yes, we should work on solutions to support



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those who are out of work through no fault of their own.”

McConnell continued,

But there is no excuse to pass unemployment insurance legislation without also finding ways to create good, stable, high-paying jobs — and also trying to find the money to pay for it. So what I’m saying is, let’s support meaningful job creation measures, and let’s find a way to pay for these ... benefits so we’re not adding to an already unsustainable debt.

Fox News reported, “Republicans, some of whom have indicated a willingness to consider an extension if it’s paid for, are ripping Democratic leaders for pushing a three-month bill that would not offset the \$6.4 billion cost elsewhere in the budget.”

“This is all borrowed — every penny of it,” observed Senator Jeff Sessions (R-Ala.)

Republicans are in three different categories on the issue: 1) supporting the extension; 2) supporting the extension but insisting that the \$6.4-billion cost is paid for; and 3) opposing the extension under any circumstances.

“I would like to find a way to get a compromise to extend unemployment insurance, at least for a brief period of time, but at the same time, the Democrats should make compromises,” Rep. Peter King (R-N.Y.) told CBS on Sunday.

President Obama has added pressure with these remarks made on Saturday:

Denying families that security is just plain cruel. We’re a better country than that.

Republicans should make it their New Year’s resolution to do the right thing and restore this vital economic security for their constituents right now.

The president also addressed the issue during a [press conference](#) Tuesday afternoon. “Letting unemployment insurance expire for millions of Americans is wrong,” he said. “Congress should make things right.”

He also addressed some of the opposition’s complaints regarding the jobless aid extension:

Now, I’ve heard the argument that says extending unemployment insurance will somehow hurt the unemployed because it saps their motivation to get a new job.... That really sells the American people short....The long-term unemployed are not lazy. They’re not lacking in motivation. They’re coping with the aftermath of the worst economic crisis in generations. In some cases, they may have a skills mismatch, right? They may have been doing a certain job for 20 years. Suddenly they lose that job.

Top Obama economic adviser Gene Sperling told reporters, “We have never, over the last half-century, cut off emergency unemployment benefits when long-term unemployment was even barely over half the rate that we have right now.”

But Republicans have deep concerns over the cost of the extension.

Senator Tom Coburn (R-Okla.) said on *Fox & Friends*,

It’s not paid for. So it’s about borrowing money from children in the future to pay for a benefit today. The real [point] is why aren’t we creating jobs and why aren’t we moving the economy and why aren’t we picking the fiscal mess that’s here? Why aren’t we creating the confidence that needs to be developed for that to happen?



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According to House Speaker John Boehner, if the Senate approves the bill, it requires serious revisions to be considered in the House.

“One month ago, I personally told the White House that another extension of temporary emergency unemployment benefits should not only be paid for but include something to help put people back to work,” he said in a statement. “To date, the president has offered no such plan. If he does, I’ll be happy to discuss it, but right now the House is going to remain focused on growing the economy and giving America’s unemployed the independence that only comes from finding a good job.”

Both parties have been utilizing angry rhetoric about the opposing side.

Reid declared that the middle class is “under siege,” provoking Senator Coburn to slam Democrats for accusing his party of not caring about people.

“I think we’ve abandoned truth in Washington,” Coburn told Fox News. “When we move to the area where people can’t trust our words because our words are always based on spin and not on facts ... what you’re seeing is the unwinding of our institutions.”

Heritage Action also voiced its opposition to an extension of unemployment benefits, calling the program “ineffective and wasteful.” According to the group’s [website](#), the emergency unemployment benefits measure “has an adverse economic impact” because it actually serves to increase unemployment rates and prolong the length of unemployment, just the opposite of what the measure is “supposed” to do.

*Photo of Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) speaking about the unemployment benefits bill:
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