

Mitch McConnell Just Opened the Door for an Extension of the \$600 Unemployment Boost ... If President Trump Supports It

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said Tuesday that he could support an extension of the \$600 unemployment benefit if Trump backs it.

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Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said on Tuesday that he could support an extension of the now-lapsed \$600 federal unemployment insurance boost – if President Donald Trump ends up backing it.

At his weekly Senate Republican leadership press conference, McConnell was asked about Speaker Nancy Pelosi's appearing to draw a red line on the weekly federal supplement and whether he could support a negotiated spending package containing it.

"Wherever this thing settles between the president of the United States and his team, who has to sign it into law, and the Democrat, not insignificant minority in the Senate and majority in the House, is something I'm prepared to support," McConnell told reporters. "Even if I have some problems with certain parts of it."

The Kentucky senator added many Republicans would likely not vote for the final stimulus legislation if it restored the measure. It has drawn fierce GOP criticism for months.

"We know this is going to be a negotiated settlement," McConnell said. "It's not going to produce a kumbaya moment like we had back in March and April where everybody voted aye. But the American people in the end need help."

The comments from McConnell signal he could be willing to reverse his position toward the \$600 benefit, despite his staunch opposition to extending it in the past. In May, he called it "a crazy policy" and pledged to scrap it during a call with House Republicans first reported by Politico.

Trump, though, does not support renewing the initiative and it's unclear if his position will change as talks on a fifth economic-relief package stretch into their second week with few signs of progress.

Federal unemployment insurance forms one of the biggest rifts in ongoing stimulus negotiations between top congressional Democrats and the White House.

Pelosi and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer are spearheading the discussions on the Democratic side. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin and White House chief of staff Mark Meadows are taking the lead for the administration. McConnell hasn't been a part of the negotiations up to now.

Republicans have repeatedly lobbed criticisms at the program, saying it allows many workers to earn more from the government and incentivize people to stay on unemployment. They rolled out a plan last week to cut the benefit to \$200 for two months and transition state agencies onto a 70 percent wage-replacement plan starting in October.

The \$600 federal supplement onto state unemployment checks was enacted in March, and many economists credit it with boosting

the economy during a massive wave of job losses.

But the bulked-up payments expired July 31, and Congress has intensely debated the amount that it should be replaced with. Senate Republicans are still deeply divided on their proposal, which they unveiled four days before the enhanced payments ended.

Democrats are pushing to revive the \$600 payouts through January, arguing the economy remains weak with scarce jobs available for unemployed people. Over 30 million people are drawing unemployment benefits.

With negotiations stalling, the Trump administration is weighing a raft of executive actions dealing with enhanced unemployment, an eviction moratorium and a payroll tax cut, *The Washington Post* reported. But the approach could run into significant legal obstacles.

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