

Opening Statement – Ranking Member Sherrod Brown
9.9.2020 Hearing – The Status of the Federal Reserve Emergency Lending Facilities

More than 150 years ago President Lincoln observed, “It has so happened in all ages of the world that some have labored, and others have, without labor, enjoyed a large portion of the fruits. This is wrong, and it should not continue.”

This pandemic is revealing just how true that still is today.

This week we celebrate Labor Day, a day when we honor the people who make our country work – all workers, whether you punch a clock or swipe a badge, whether you’re raising children or caring for an aging parent.

But workers deserve more than empty words in a tweet or an email message.

For months we’ve seen advertisements and PR campaigns from big corporations proclaiming how dedicated they are to the essential workers that are keeping our country running – but statements that aren’t followed up by increased pay or safer workplaces ring hollow, whether they’re from companies or government officials.

This Labor Day, the country isn’t living up to its promise to workers.

Whether it’s ending the \$600 a week unemployment insurance that was keeping millions of families afloat, or just the simple promise that families won’t lose their homes, under President Trump, our government has given up on support for workers.

We are on the precipice of another Great Depression.

And if you have the privilege to work from home and you’ve been watching your stock portfolio slowly rebound, and you’re thinking right now, “this guy’s being alarmist,” I have news for you – you don’t understand the real economy.

No matter how well the stock market is doing, no matter how high bank profits and corporate profits are – if workers cannot work– and I say “can’t work,” not “won’t work,” because workers are desperate to get back on the job safely – our economy can’t work. The president’s failure to get this pandemic under control is keeping tens of millions of workers who want to go to work sitting on the sidelines of our economy.

If people can’t go to work, can’t pay their rent or mortgage, can’t pay their car payment or credit card bills – the bottom will fall out of this economy.

It has been over six months since we passed comprehensive coronavirus relief for working Americans, and because of the president’s failed leadership, things have only gotten worse. He’s allowed the virus to rage out of control. Nearly 190,000 Americans have died in less than 6 months.

School districts have been forced to make impossible decisions—reopen and put students and teachers at risk, or continue to teach remotely, putting an unbearable load on working parents and widening the achievement gap. State and local governments are trying to step in and help, but their tax revenues are down because taxpayers have lost their jobs and businesses have had to shut their doors or operate with fewer customers. And that’s only going to mean more layoffs of good middle-class jobs, extending the cycle of misery.

After Leader McConnell and President Trump allowed the \$600 expanded UI benefits expire, and refused to pass additional stimulus checks and housing assistance and support for local communities, the emergency lending programs we are talking about today are really the only programs left operating to prop up our economy – and none of these Fed lending programs are actually helping workers.

Dividends are still getting paid, and CEOs are still getting their salaries and bonuses. The stock market continues to get a lift. If you make your money from a brokerage statement, the government is still helping you – in fact, you're pretty much the only one the government is helping.

But that help is not trickling down from big banks and corporations to the people who make their money from a weekly paycheck – the vast, vast majority of the American people.

It should be obvious to everyone by now that those benefits to the wealthy never “trickle-down” to the workers who make this economy run. They didn't with the corporate tax cut two years ago, and they aren't now.

Instead, these programs are helping corporations—many of which continue to lay off workers and have cut hazard pay for those who are still risking their lives on the front lines of this pandemic, if they even bothered to pay those workers hazard pay, to begin with.

We are going about this backwards.

Every dollar we give to working families goes directly to supporting the real economy, when those families pay their rent and their mortgages and their bills, and when they buy groceries and school supplies and spend money at a local business. In fact, if we put families and workers first, we wouldn't have to bail out any corporations at all – the market that so many in this committee profess to put so much faith in would take care of that.

Of course, we also know our economy will not fully recover while the virus is still not under control.

The CARES Act that we passed in March was designed to be temporary relief – to get our workers and their families through the immediate economic hardships while we marshalled all of our country's vast resources and talent to stop a pandemic. The president failed to do that, and now what we thought would be a relatively short economic disruption has dragged on for months and months, with no end in sight.

We still have no mask mandate, we still have no national testing strategy, we still have no effective contact tracing. We are seeing another resurgence across 22 states. As a result, we're just four percent of the world's population and 22 percent of the world's deaths.

Imagine if the president had taken this seriously in the spring. Imagine if he'd said we should all wear masks and had modeled good precautions we should all take. Imagine if he'd said we are going to mobilize America's manufacturing talent and make enough tests to test every public school by the summer. Imagine where we could be as a society right now.

Instead, the president has given up on controlling this pandemic at all until a vaccine is developed – and given the scope of his failures thus far, we can only assume he will fail just as badly at distributing a vaccine once that day comes if he's still in office.

The economy will not recover until this President, and his cabinet, and his friends in Congress, take governing seriously.

Later this month, we'll have a hearing with Secretary Mnuchin and Chair Powell. Unlike today's hearing, that one will be conducted in person. That's because the President has told his top officials they must testify in person, in his continued attempts to gaslight the American people about the dangers of the virus.

We should be conducting all hearings remotely, not just to protect Senators and administration officials, but to protect all of the workers in the Capitol – the janitors, Capitol police officers, and food service workers who are forced to show up and put themselves at risk, and then worry they are bringing the virus home to their families.

After six months of failures, I am honestly surprised that the President's friends in Congress continue to let him get away with it.

Mr. Chairman, we need your help and your leadership. You have done the right thing by conducting the rest of our hearings remotely, and we need you to demand that the White House sends the right message about taking the coronavirus seriously – tell Secretary Mnuchin he needs to testify remotely. I have no doubt Chair Powell would be happy to do so if you asked.

And we need your help convincing Mitch McConnell to extend direct support for families while we fight this virus and get our country back on track. The House has already passed a bill that would take care of workers, renters, homeowners, students and seniors, and veterans. We all know this “emaciated” McConnell proposal isn't going to help any of those families keep food on the table.

When something isn't right, we speak up – that's the job we signed up for. And right now thousands of people are dying each day, and Republicans aren't speaking up.

The best way Congress could celebrate Labor Day this year is by doing its job. And we need your help to tell President Trump and Mitch McConnell that it's time to get to work. We have wasted too much time already.

Thank you.

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