

Biden Pushes for Quick Passage of Relief Bill as Jobs Report Shows Weak Growth



President Joe Biden, accompanied by Vice President Kamala Harris, House Democratic leaders in the Oval Office of the White House, Feb. 5, 2021.

WASHINGTON - President Joe Biden said Congress must quickly pass his \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief package to counter the economic effects of the ongoing pandemic as a new government jobs report showed hiring had stalled.

Biden told a meeting of House Democratic leaders Friday that at the current pace of job creation, the United States would not return to full employment for 10 years.

The jobs report, released Friday by the U.S. Department of Labor, showed employment growth rebounded less than expected in January, and job losses in December were worse than initially thought.



President Joe Biden speaks about the economy in the State Dining Room of the White House, Feb. 5, 2021, in Washington.

It said the U.S. economy added 49,000 jobs in January but also revised the number of jobs lost in December to 227,000, up from the 140,000 losses reported in the early January report.

“It is very clear our economy is still in trouble,” Biden told lawmakers.

“We have more than 10 million people out of work, 4 million people have been out of work for six months or longer, and 2.5 million women have been driven from the workforce,” he said.

Biden's coronavirus relief proposal includes new \$1,400 stimulus checks for many Americans, as well as additional funding for food and nutrition, and an extension on unemployment benefits.

The Biden administration has said it is willing to lower the threshold for qualifying for the \$1,400 stimulus so that it better targets lower-income Americans, however, it has said it is not willing to lower the amount of the checks.

The Senate passed a budget resolution early Friday, marking a key step that would allow Democrats to pass a relief package without the threat of a filibuster from opposing Republicans, who say Biden's relief plan is too expensive. The House passed the resolution later in the day Friday.

Republican lawmakers have pushed to scale down the package, arguing that \$1.9 trillion needlessly increases the federal deficit.

Biden's push Friday for his relief package comes in the same week that he met with 10 Republican senators who proposed a slimmed-down, \$618 billion alternative relief bill. Biden has said he is willing to work with Republicans, however, on Friday he said that aid at a lower level would only prolong the economic pain.

"I'd like to be doing it with the support of Republicans ... they're just not willing to go as far as I think we have to go," Biden said.



In this image from Senate TV, Vice President Kamala Harris sits in the chair on the Senate floor to cast the tie-breaking vote, her first, at the Capitol in Washington, Feb. 5, 2021.

The Senate budget resolution passed 51-50 Friday morning, with Vice President Kamala Harris casting her first tie-breaking vote.

Passage came after a marathon overnight session dubbed "Vote-a-Rama," in which more than 800 amendments were proposed. Despite the amendments, Biden's plan remains largely intact.

"We cannot repeat the mistakes of the past," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said in a floor speech before voting Thursday. Many Democrats feel the

government did not provide enough stimulus during the 2008 recession.

The resolution then went to the House of Representatives, where it passed 219-209 on Friday afternoon, also without a Republican vote. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said Friday she hoped the House would send the final package to the Senate in two weeks.

Democratic lawmakers have said they want a final bill passed by mid-March when extra unemployment assistance and other pandemic aid expires.

Source:

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