

There has never been a better time to get Americans back to work



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KEY FINDINGS

1

EMPLOYERS ARE STRUGGLING TO FILL A RECORD-HIGH 8.1 MILLION OPEN JOBS.



2

GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS DISCOURAGE WORK BY PAYING MORE TO STAY HOME.



3

INDIVIDUALS CAN NOW COLLECT UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS FOR MORE THAN A YEAR.



4

STATES ACROSS THE COUNTRY HAVE SUSPENDED WORK SEARCH REQUIREMENTS.



5

WHILE CONGRESS DISCUSSES MAKING THESE POLICIES PERMANENT, STATES ARE LEADING THE WAY BY ENDING THEM EARLY.



THE BOTTOM LINE:

IN ORDER TO KICKSTART THE AMERICAN ECONOMY, ALL STATES SHOULD END THESE HARMFUL POLICIES AND CONGRESS SHOULD LET THEM EXPIRE ONCE AND FOR ALL.

Background

Employers across the country have more than 8.1 million open jobs sitting unfilled.¹ But while this is usually a sign of a booming economy, the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and related economic shutdowns has stalled under the Biden administration.²

One major reason: Government programs pay more to stay home than to return to work.³ Federal actions to create an unemployment bonus, extend benefits, relax eligibility rules, and suspend work search requirements have made it virtually impossible for small businesses to compete with government benefits. As a result, individuals can now collect more in benefits by staying out of the workforce, can collect those benefits for more than a year, and have absolutely no expectation set for them to even attempt to find a new job.

Although these programs have sunset dates, Congress has expanded and extended them multiple times, most recently in March 2021.⁴ Indeed, Democrats in Congress have even called for making these policies permanent and expanding unemployment even further.⁵⁻⁶

Thankfully, states are charting a different course. Instead of doubling down on joblessness, states are hard at work to get their economies moving again.⁷ By May 18, 2021, a whopping 22 states had announced that they were ending these pandemic-related unemployment policies.⁸ All states should follow suit and end these federal policies that are creating massive labor shortages, decimating Americans' work ethic, trapping millions in government dependency, and stalling the economic recovery.

Meanwhile, Congress should allow these programs to expire once and for all. Businesses are desperate to kickstart the economy and hire millions of workers. It is past time for Congress to get out of their way.

Employers are struggling to fill a record-high 8.1 million open jobs

As businesses have reopened, they face a new struggle: They simply cannot find enough workers to meet demand. "Now hiring" signs are plastered on virtually every commercial street in America. By March 2021, employers across the country had 8.1 million open jobs sitting unfilled—a record high.⁹⁻¹⁰ Filling those existing vacancies would be enough to bring employment above its pre-pandemic levels.¹¹⁻¹³

**BY MARCH 2021, EMPLOYERS
ACROSS THE COUNTRY HAD 8.1
MILLION OPEN JOBS SITTING
UNFILLED—A RECORD HIGH.**



EMPLOYERS HAVE A RECORD-HIGH NUMBER OF OPEN JOBS

Estimated number of open jobs in March 2021, by state

STATE	OPEN JOBS	STATE	OPEN JOBS
Alabama	121,000	Montana	29,000
Alaska	20,000	Nebraska	63,000
Arizona	196,000	Nevada	81,000
Arkansas	69,000	New Hampshire	40,000
California	803,000	New Jersey	271,000
Colorado	124,000	New Mexico	49,000
Connecticut	79,000	New York	423,000
Delaware	26,000	North Carolina	256,000
District of Columbia	37,000	North Dakota	22,000
Florida	479,000	Ohio	283,000
Georgia	307,000	Oklahoma	94,000
Hawaii	26,000	Oregon	125,000
Idaho	47,000	Pennsylvania	328,000
Illinois	296,000	Rhode Island	27,000
Indiana	184,000	South Carolina	137,000
Iowa	82,000	South Dakota	25,000
Kansas	82,000	Tennessee	161,000
Kentucky	112,000	Texas	686,000
Louisiana	104,000	Utah	81,000
Maine	34,000	Vermont	20,000
Maryland	171,000	Virginia	249,000
Massachusetts	191,000	Washington	158,000
Michigan	236,000	West Virginia	52,000
Minnesota	135,000	Wisconsin	141,000
Mississippi	66,000	Wyoming	17,000
Missouri	150,000		

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Foundation for Government Accountability

Sadly, employers are finding it nearly impossible to fill open positions. A whopping **73 percent of small business owners report difficulty hiring workers.**¹⁴ Most have been forced to turn away customers or missed other growth opportunities because they could not find enough employees.¹⁵ Most report that even when they manage to get applicants and make a hire, some of those new hires never show up for work.¹⁶ The labor shortage is so bad that nearly one in three employers say they are likely to close within the next year if they cannot find enough workers.¹⁷

Virtually every sector of the economy is experiencing mass labor shortages

The leisure and hospitality industries were hit extremely hard by the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic shutdowns that followed: In March and April 2020 alone, nearly half of jobs in that sector disappeared.¹⁸ Millions of those workers have yet to come back, even as sales have returned to pre-pandemic levels.¹⁹⁻²² These industries now face the most severe labor shortage they have ever experienced.²³

But the labor shortage crisis extends far beyond just the leisure and hospitality sector. For example, Look Trailers, a utility trailer manufacturer with five factories scattered across the country, recently spent thousands of dollars on “help wanted” ads to fill 125 open jobs.²⁴ Unfortunately, they were able to fill just two positions from the ads.²⁵



**MANUFACTURERS ACROSS THE COUNTRY
HAVE MORE THAN 700,000 GOOD-PAYING
JOBS SITTING UNFILLED.**

They are not alone: Manufacturers across the country have more than 700,000 good-paying jobs sitting unfilled—a record high.²⁶ Wages in this industry average more than \$29 per hour.²⁷

Virtually every sector of the economy is experiencing these issues, from construction to transportation to health care, even as businesses continue to spike wages to attract and retain workers.²⁸

Businesses cannot attract workers, even with skyrocketing wages

Congressional Democrats have flippantly declared that the labor shortage crisis is simply the result of “starvation wages.”²⁹⁻³⁵ Some have even declared that employers who struggle to fill these jobs “shouldn’t be in business” at all.³⁶

But the reality is that wages are at an all-time high, with every single sector of the American economy seeing wage growth in April 2021.³⁷ In fact, wages in leisure and hospitality industries grew by a staggering 37 percent in April, on an annualized basis.³⁸ In the retail sector, wages grew by nearly 28 percent annualized.³⁹ Wages in the construction industry grew by more than 19 percent, with some specialties like glaziers seeing wages skyrocket by more than 50 percent in a single month.⁴⁰⁻⁴¹



**WAGES ARE AT AN ALL-TIME HIGH,
WITH EVERY SINGLE SECTOR OF
THE AMERICAN ECONOMY SEEING
WAGE GROWTH IN APRIL 2021.**

WAGES IN THE LEISURE AND HOSPITALITY SECTOR ROSE BY MORE THAN 37 PERCENT ON AN ANNUALIZED BASIS IN APRIL 2021—THE FASTEST GROWTH EVER RECORDED

Monthly change in average hourly wages for production and nonsupervisory employees in the leisure and hospitality sector, annualized



Source: U.S. Department of Labor

Despite record-high wages and a record high number of open jobs, the economy remains sluggish. Economists predicted the economy would add more than one million new jobs in April and the unemployment rate would drop by another two-tenths of a percentage point.⁴² Instead, the economy added just 266,000 new jobs and the unemployment rate actually went up for the first time since the pandemic hit.⁴³⁻⁴⁴ **The challenge most small businesses now face is that, despite skyrocketing wages and plenty of open jobs, they simply cannot compete with government benefits like unemployment.**

Government programs discourage work by paying more to stay home

One of small businesses' biggest issues today is that people are being paid more to stay home than return to work.⁴⁵ Since the pandemic hit, federal policymakers have pushed through a vast array of welfare benefit boosts, unemployment bonuses, and tax credit increases, while suspending many traditional requirements for eligibility.⁴⁶ This includes everything from a \$300 unemployment bonus and extending unemployment eligibility to more than a year to relaxed eligibility rules for welfare programs like food stamps and Medicaid, an unprecedented new child tax credit scheme, and more.⁴⁷ As a result, many unemployed individuals find themselves in a position where they can collect more in unemployment and other welfare benefits than they could earn working.⁴⁸

Take, for example, an unemployed father with two kids under school age. Someone in this situation would be able to collect \$3,694 per month in these cash and cash-equivalent benefits—more than \$44,000 per year.⁴⁹

MONTHLY CASH BENEFITS PAY THOUSANDS TO REMAIN HOME

Value of total cash and cash-equivalent benefits for an unemployed low-wage worker with two children under the age of six

GOVERNMENT BENEFIT	MONETARY VALUE
Regular state unemployment insurance	\$1,003 per month
\$300 weekly unemployment bonus	\$1,300 per month
Food stamps	\$365 per month
Child tax credits	\$600 per month
Earned income tax credit	\$426 per month
TOTAL	\$3,694 per month

Source: Foundation for Government Accountability

A full-time worker would need to earn more than \$21 per hour—nearly three times the minimum wage—just to equal the value of these taxpayer-funded benefits.⁵⁰ Even worse, these taxpayer-funded benefits provide more than even the average full-time worker earns.⁵¹

Individuals can now collect unemployment benefits for more than a year

If paying people more to stay home than return to work were not bad enough, those individuals can now spend more than a year on unemployment with no expectations of rejoining the labor force any time soon.

In 2020, Congress created a new federal program extending unemployment benefits after individuals' exhaust their regular state unemployment benefits.⁵² That program was expanded to 53 weeks in March 2021.⁵³ In some states, individuals may also qualify for additional extended benefits, based on economic indicators.⁵⁴ Once all other unemployment benefits have been exhausted, the pandemic unemployment assistance program kicks in to extend benefits even further.⁵⁵

All told, individuals can collect unemployment benefits through these programs for between 79 and 86 weeks, depending on the state.⁵⁶⁻⁵⁸



INDIVIDUALS CAN COLLECT UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS THROUGH THESE PROGRAMS FOR BETWEEN 79 AND 86 WEEKS, DEPENDING ON THE STATE.

Getting unemployed workers back into the workforce as quickly as possible is critical to growing the economy and helping them back onto the path to the American Dream. The longer individuals are unemployed, the more likely they are to fall into long-term dependency, the more difficult it is to find work, and the greater likelihood they will lose critical job skills.⁵⁹

States across the country have suspended work search requirements

In the early days of the pandemic, Congress mandated that states suspend basic eligibility rules for the unemployment system, including work search requirements.⁶⁰ Even as the mandate faded, the U.S. Department of Labor allowed states to continue waiving those requirements for those seeking unemployment benefits—even though benefits are typically reserved for those available, able, and actively looking for work.⁶¹ Most states were still waiving these requirements in May 2021.⁶²



THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR HAS ALLOWED STATES TO CONTINUE TO WAIVE WORK REQUIREMENTS FOR THOSE SEEKING UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS.

In total, unemployed individuals can now collect more in government benefits by staying home than they would earn working, can collect those benefits for more than a year, and have absolutely no expectation set for them to even attempt to find a new job.

While Congress discusses making these policies permanent, states are leading the way by ending them early

Although these programs have sunset dates, Congress has expanded and extended them multiple times, most recently in March 2021.⁶³ When drafting the latest extensions, policymakers failed to create phase-out periods for these programs, signaling that future extensions are likely.⁶⁴ Indeed, Democrats in Congress have even called for making these policies permanent and expanding unemployment even further.⁶⁵⁻⁶⁶

Those radical proposals include:

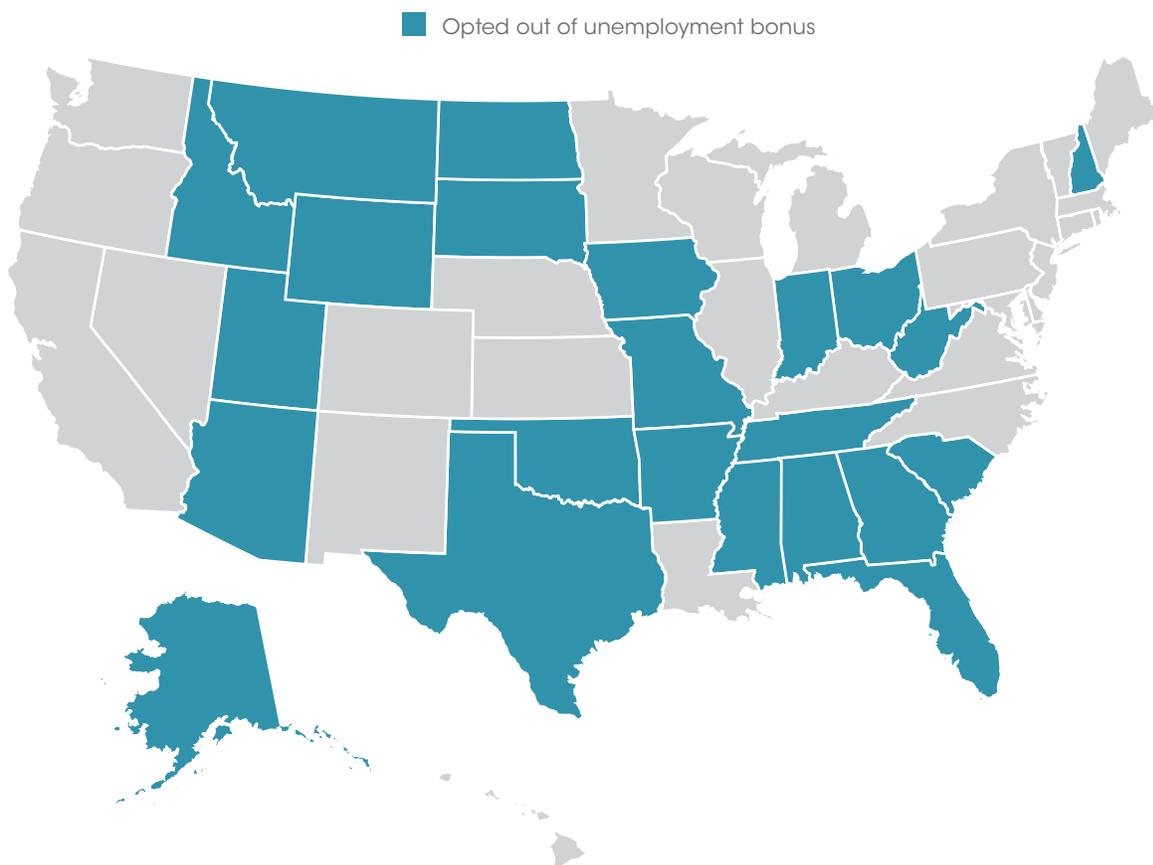
- Requiring states to **provide at least six months of unemployment benefits**, even during periods of record-low unemployment and severe labor shortages;
- Creating a **permanent program that extends unemployment benefits** by up to an additional year beyond states' regular benefits;
- **Increasing unemployment benefits by an average of 50 percent** during periods of low unemployment;
- **Increasing unemployment benefits by an average of 100 percent** during any disaster or emergency declaration periods;
- Mandating that **states provide unemployment benefits to applicants who voluntarily quit their jobs** for a variety of reasons;
- Forcing states to **classify many self-employed workers and independent contractors as employees** of their clients; and
- **Increasing taxes on employers** to fund new benefits.

Thankfully, states are charting a different course. Instead of doubling down on joblessness, many states are hard at work to get their economies moving again. Under federal law, states can end the unemployment bonus, unwind the extensions, and reinstitute work search requirements with appropriate notice to the U.S. Department of Labor. A number of states are doing just that.

On May 4, 2021, Montana Governor Greg Gianforte announced that he was withdrawing from these programs.⁶⁷ Over the next week, another nine governors joined him.⁶⁸ By May 24, 2021, a whopping 23 states had announced that they were ending these pandemic-related unemployment policies.⁶⁹

23 STATES HAVE OPTED OUT OF THE UNEMPLOYMENT BONUS

As of May 24, 2021



All states should follow suit and end these federal policies that are creating massive labor shortages, decimating Americans' worth ethic, trapping millions in government dependency, and stalling the economic recovery.

Meanwhile, Congress should allow these programs to expire once and for all. Businesses are desperate to kickstart the economy and hire millions of workers. It is past time for Congress to get out of their way.

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