

Virus deaths, joblessness soar as Senate's ruling Republicans dither



By Mark Gruenberg

New data on both coronavirus deaths and rising numbers of people getting unemployment compensation checks again point up how the U.S. Senate's ruling Republicans are dithering over helping them even as national misery rises.

And even if lawmakers finally pass a stripped-down economic aid bill, there will still be a one-week gap, from Dec. 26-Jan. 1, before federal jobless aid resumes, according to all versions floating around Congress. Those federal-only unemployment programs cover some 14 million people, National Public Radio reported.

That figure understates the suffering. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported Dec. 17 that 20.647 million people already receive state or federal jobless aid as of Nov. 28, including 1.603 million who started getting the funds just that week.

That group doesn't include the 2.762 million more—1.39 million in the week ending Dec. 12 alone—who have sought state and federal aid since the end of November. Add the two biggest numbers up and one of every six U.S. workers is seeking or getting unemployment compensation.

The situation is even worse in some of the nation's poorest neighborhoods, such as the South Bronx, which faces 26% joblessness, MSNBC reported, or the Chicago West Side neighborhood of Austin.

Those aren't the only horrifying numbers. The U.S. set a new daily death record from the coronavirus pandemic, on Dec. 16, of 3,656. Almost a quarter of a million people tested positive that day, too.

As of 10 a.m. on Dec. 17, 17 million people have tested positive since the pandemic was officially declared on March 13. Almost one of every ten "positives" occurred in just the top five counties for the illness: Los Angeles, Cook (Chicago), Maricopa (Phoenix), Miami-Dade, and Harris (Houston).

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L.A. alone has had 566,005 people test positive. New York City's four large counties had more than 336,500.

Of the ill nationwide, 307,543 have died. That's more than all U.S. deaths from World War II and equal to everybody living in Cincinnati, plus 3,500

As jobless rates and death rates rise faster than ever the McConnell-led Senate still dragging its feet on aid to the people.

people in its suburbs.

And analysts are predicting the plague will only worsen, as more of the millions who disregarded stay-at-home urgings over Thanksgiving test positive, due to the two-week incubation period for the virus. The analysts expect another surge following holiday travel around and between Dec. 25 and Jan. 1, too.

Meanwhile, lawmakers continue discussing pandemic economic-related aid, with the proposed total seemingly shrinking by the day. The latest figure is \$748 billion in a main aid bill that would run from Jan. 1-April 30.

It would dole out \$300 billion to small businesses—and, this time, with a 30-worker limit per business—plus money for airline workers (\$17 billion), Amtrak (\$1 billion) and the Postal Service (a new \$10 billion line of credit, with no strings attached).

It also would have \$180 billion for those restored federal jobless benefits—at \$300 weekly, not \$600—\$15 billion for mass transit, \$54 billion for K-12 schools, and \$25 billion for in rental aid, available after a month-long extension on the current ban on evictions and foreclosures.

But that measure would stiff state and local governments, who have seen their revenues tank since the coronavirus-caused depression and closures began. Democrats want to allot \$160 billion. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., wants to let them go broke—unless he gets his favorite plaything, a ban on anyone suing businesses who don't protect workers or customers against the virus.

And that includes banning lawsuits under major labor laws, such as the minimum wage, overtime, and the Occupational Safety and Health Act.

Baseball rewrites history, says Negro Leagues now a major league

By Associated Press

Major League Baseball has reclassified the Negro Leagues as a major league and will count the statistics and records of its 3,400 players as part of its history.

The league said Dec. 16 it was “correcting a long-time oversight in the game’s history” by elevating the Negro Leagues on the centennial of its founding.

The Negro Leagues consisted of seven leagues, and MLB will include records from those circuits between 1920-48. The Negro Leagues began to dissolve one year after Jackie Robinson became MLB’s first Black player with the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947.

Those leagues were excluded in 1969 when the Special Committee on Baseball Records identified six official “major leagues” dating to 1876.

“It is MLB’s view that the Committee’s 1969 omission of the Negro Leagues from consideration was clearly an error that demands today’s designation,” the league said in a statement.

MLB said it considered input from the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, the Negro League Researchers and Authors Group, and studies by other baseball authors and researchers.

The league will work with the Elias Sports Bureau to review Negro Leagues statistics and records and figure out how to incorporate them into MLB’s history.

“All of us who love baseball have long known that the Negro Leagues produced many of our game’s best players, innovations and triumphs against a backdrop of injustice,” Commissioner Rob Manfred said in a statement.

“We are now grateful to count the players of the Negro Leagues where they belong: as Major Leaguers within the official historical record.”

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Disaster looms unless governments cut greenhouse gases



By John Bachtell

Unless governments cut greenhouse gas emissions decisively the world is headed toward a climate catastrophe, warned United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. Many countries are moving in the wrong direction and he called upon all nations to declare “climate emergencies” and too act.

Guterres was addressing the UN Climate Ambition Summit on Dec. 12 on the Paris Climate Agreement’s fifth anniversary. Scientists say greenhouse gas emissions must be reduced by 50% over the next decade to prevent global warming of 1.5 degrees Celsius and avert a climate catastrophe. However, warming is accelerating faster than predicted and could reach that point in just five years.

Promises made by countries to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the agreement were insufficient to prevent global warming, said Guterres. And most countries are not even on track to meet those goals. Guterres was sharply critical of G-20 countries for spending 50% of economic stimulus monies on sectors related to fossil fuels rather than seeing this as an opportunity to transition to renewable energies. The world will have to reduce fossil fuel consumption by 6% a year through 2030 to avoid raising global temperatures by 1.5C.

Thirty-eight nations have declared climate emergencies, and many, including the Vatican under Pope Francis, have plans to go carbon neutral by 2050. Meanwhile, the Trump administration’s response

to the climate crisis was to thumb its nose at the world by withdrawing the U.S. from the agreement. Trump declared the climate crisis a “hoax,” wasted four precious years gutting environmental protections, and put the fossil fuel industry in charge of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

President-elect Joe Biden plans to put climate action at the top of his agenda. He said the world is in a “climate emergency” and called for drastic action during the campaign. However, he has not yet committed his administration to this emergency.

Biden is committed to the U.S. rejoining the Paris Agreement and announced plans to host a climate summit of the world’s major economies in his administration’s first 100 days. Biden will appoint John Kerry as the first-ever Climate Envoy. As Secretary of State in the Obama administration, Kerry was a key negotiator of the Paris Climate Agreement.

Biden is projecting plans to go carbon neutral by 2050. He’ll reverse all of Trump’s executive orders rolling back environmental protections, rebuild the EPA, rely heavily on the Clean Air Act to adopt regulations reducing greenhouse gases, and invest in green jobs to transition to renewable energy.

The global community will gather in November 2021 at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) summit to adopt new measures to accelerate the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and achieve carbon neutrality by 2050.

UN calls on all countries to declare climate emergencies.

Israel: Left and Arab Israelis hail Trump defeat as also a defeat for Netanyahu

By Emile Schepers

On the website of the Maki, Israel's communist party, Ayman Odeh, the head of the Hadash alliance of leftist and Arab parties to which the Maki also belongs, hailed the defeat of Donald Trump in the U.S. elections as a severe blow to the extreme right-wing government of Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu. Odeh and his Hadash colleague, Knesset member Aida Touma-Sliman, say that the disappearance of Trump makes possible the defeat of "the deal of the century," the Trump-Netanyahu plan which is threatening to destroy all hopes for a Palestinian state.

The article also reports worry by the right-wing government that Biden's promise to reverse Trump's withdrawal from the nuclear agreement with Iran will lead to a "violent confrontation" between that country and Israel.

Biden tiene que restaurar la frontera con urgencia

Dan Millis

En la frontera con México, hemos visto algunos de los efectos más devastadores de la administración Trump. Ha completado más de 415 millas de nuevas barreras y refuerzos, usando fondos robados a las Fuerzas Armadas y destruyendo comunidades, hábitat y parajes silvestres.

Trump anuló protecciones culturales y ambientales para construir su muro y ha permitido la destrucción de terrenos tribales además de cementerios sagrados de la Nación Tohono O'odham. Para construir el muro, su administración usó una parte obsoleta de la Ley Real ID para saltarse leyes como la de Agua Limpia, la de Política Ambiental Nacional, la de Aire Limpio, la de Especies en Peligro, y la de Protección de Tumbas y Repatriación de Indígenas Americanos, la cual protege la herencia cultural de las tribus. Este es el mayor abuso desde que se aprobó la Ley Real ID.

La agenda promilitarización y antiinmigrante de la administración Trump inflige un enorme daño a las comunidades que viven en armonía con nuestros vecinos del sur. En nombre de los derechos humanos y ambientales, la administración Biden tiene que reparar el daño y restaurar los terrenos fronterizos.

El muro no es solo un símbolo de las políticas racistas de Trump. También inflige un daño irreparable al medio ambiente. La construcción de nuevas barreras ya ha destrozado algunos de los parajes más biológicamente diversos de Norteamérica.

Ese muro pone aún en más peligro a 100 especies vulnerables. Ya nos encontramos en una extinción masiva en el planeta Tierra, la primera causada por el ser humano. Construir muros que destruyen hábitat es lo opuesto a lo que deberíamos estar haciendo para evitar más devastación.

Instamos al Presidente-Electo Biden a cumplir con su promesa de acabar con los contratos de construcción del muro y suspender con las anulaciones de protecciones ambientales y culturales de Trump. Biden tiene que ordenar al Cuerpo de Ingenieros del Ejército y al Departamento de Seguridad Nacional cancelar todos los contratos y anulaciones emitidos desde 2005. Solo se trata de deshacer las dañinas decisiones de Trump y debe ser una prioridad absoluta.

La administración Biden tiene que trabajar con estos grupos migratorios y fronterizos para asegurarse de que no se dañen más a estas vibrantes comunidades culturalmente ricas. Esto requerirá que la administración Biden vaya aún más allá. Tiene que derribar las barreras existentes que han diezmado y continúan dañando hábitat, personas y terrenos públicos. El Programa de Terrenos Fronterizos del Sierra Club quiere soluciones verdaderas a estos retos en el Suroeste. La administración Biden tiene que abordar una reforma migratoria justa y equitativa con una vía a la ciudadanía que solucione las causas fundamentales de los complejos problemas fronterizos. Estos primeros pasos deben ser una prioridad en los primeros 100 de su presidencia.

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