

Congress of the United States

U.S. House of Representatives

July 27, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
U.S. Capitol, H-232
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
U.S. Capitol, S-230
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
U.S. Capitol, H-204
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
U.S. Capitol, S-221
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader McConnell, Leader McCarthy, and Leader Schumer:

As you enter into negotiations regarding legislation to further address the public health and economic crises caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, we write to urge you to extend the extremely successful Payroll Support Program (PSP) included in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act, Pub. L. No. 116-136), which saved the jobs of 950,000 of frontline airline industry workers such as mechanics, baggage handlers, gate agents, catering workers, flight attendants, and pilots, among others. Roughly 750,000 of these women and men work directly for airlines, and at least 200,000 work for airline contractors and clean cabins, prepare meals, and handle baggage, among other things.

The PSP—a novel program in which the government effectively passes paychecks to airline industry workers through their employers—will keep workers on the payrolls and off unemployment lines through September 30, 2020. But while time marches on, so does the pandemic, with hardly any green shoots sprouting for the airlines as they continue to face the worst crisis by far in the industry’s history. Last Wednesday, a major airline put 36,000 workers across the country on notice that they could be furloughed on or after October 1. Other carriers have issued and will issue similar notices.

According to the most recent airline traffic data, U.S. air carriers reported a 96 percent drop in passenger traffic for April 2020 over April 2019.¹ And so far in July, total traveler throughput at Transportation Security Administration checkpoints dropped by, on average, more than 70 percent compared to the same period in 2019.² Without further relief from Congress, mass layoffs among airline industry workers are inevitable—and their magnitude will eclipse those of any furloughs the industry has ever seen.

¹ Dep’t of Transp., Bureau of Transp. Stats., “Preliminary Air Traffic Data, April 2020: 96% Reduction in U.S. Airline Passengers from 2019,” at <https://www.bts.gov/newsroom/preliminary-air-traffic-data-april-2020-96-reduction-us-airline-passengers-2019>.

² See TSA, TSA Checkpoint Travel Numbers for 2020 and 2019, <https://www.tsa.gov/coronavirus/passenger-throughput>.

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The PSP's payroll pass-through saved hundreds of thousands of frontline airline workers' jobs—and not a penny went to the airlines themselves or their shareholders.

According to Secretary Mnuchin's own calculations, taxpayers realized a 70 percent return just from payroll and income tax receipts and reduced unemployment insurance payments. Other sizable government savings, made possible by keeping tens of thousands of airline workers employed, include those to Medicaid and state unemployment programs.

With the resurgence of COVID-19 in several States across the country and a vaccine for the virus yet to be developed, passenger demand for air travel will not recover before the PSP expires on September 30. **And without an extension of the PSP before then, hundreds of thousands of airline workers will be fired or furloughed on October 1.** To save nearly one million airline industry jobs, we must extend the PSP through March 31, 2021.

Thank you for your attention to this extremely important matter that will save jobs and ensure the U.S. airline system remains viable as a national security asset and engine of economic recovery once the pandemic is finally behind us.

Sincerely,

/s/
PETER A. DeFAZIO
Chair, Committee on Transportation
and Infrastructure

/s/
SHARICE L. DAVIDS
Vice Chair, Subcommittee on Aviation

/s/
KAREN BASS
Member of Congress

/s/
BRIAN FITZPATRICK
Member of Congress

/s/
THOMAS SUOZZI
Member of Congress

/s/
DAVID CICILLINE
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RICK LARSEN
Chair, Subcommittee on Aviation

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JOHN KATKO
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JAN SCHAKOWSKY
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