

## FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITY: AUGUST 2020

### COVID-19

The Senate adjourned on August 7 without voting on a response to the HEROES Act passed by the House on May 15. On August 8, President Trump took unilateral action that falls disastrously short of what is needed:

- The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) will expend up to \$44 billion from the Disaster Relief Fund to extend federal unemployment benefits and replace wages lost by 30 million Americans due to COVID-19. Benefits will be cut in half—from \$300 to \$600—and could last as little as three weeks, according to FEMA. State participation is optional. No payments have been made as yet in most states.

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued an eviction moratorium stipulating that certain renters cannot be evicted for the remainder of 2020. However, there's no plan to help people get out from under months of payments.

- The moratorium on student loan payments has been extended for four months (through December 2020) instead of a full year (through September 2021) as the HEROES Act would do. The four-month extension, which counts as progress for purposes of Public Service Loan Forgiveness, does not apply to the 8 million borrowers with commercially held loans or Perkins grants.

- Potentially worst of all, collection of the payroll tax that funds Social Security and Medicare has been suspended for the rest of 2020—a backdoor approach to dismantling both programs as we know them. Trump said he will cancel the tax permanently if reelected—a move that would put the very existence of these essential programs at extreme risk. Rep. John Larson (D-CT), Chairman of the House Ways & Means Social Security Subcommittee, vowed to stop the president's plan to “dismantle and defund” Social Security in a [video](#) distributed to the House and posted on Twitter.

[NEA again urged Congress](#) to provide at least \$175 billion to stabilize education funding, at least \$4 billion to equip students with hot spots and devices to help narrow the digital divide and close the homework gap, furnish personal protective equipment (PPE) for students and educators, bolster the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to ensure children do not go hungry, and more.

NEA also submitted comments for the record for the House Coronavirus Crisis Select Subcommittee's August 5 hearing, [Challenges to Safely Reopening K-12 Schools](#).

In addition, we continued to build support for our positions through advocacy with partners and allies:

- An August 6 [letter](#) from NEA and three other leading unions—the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), and the Service Employees International Union (SEIU)—urged senators and representatives “to prioritize preventing the further spread of COVID-19 in any legislation relating to the pandemic, rather than offering liability protections that would release nonprofits, state and local governments, schools, campuses, healthcare institutions, and other organizations from the responsibility for providing safe and healthy conditions.”
- An August 6 [letter](#) signed by 42 organizations, including NEA, urged House and Senate leadership to “(1) allocate substantial aid to colleges and universities, well beyond that which was included in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, and (2) award those dollars in a manner heavily weighted toward low-income students and using a measure of unduplicated headcount instead of full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment.”
- An August 11 [letter](#) signed by 1,315 organizations, including NEA, urged the U.S. Department of Agriculture to use its existing waiver authority to ensure continued access to meal programs to ensure that children do not go hungry and have nutritious food like fresh fruit and vegetables.

### **OTHER LEGISLATIVE NEWS\***

NEA urged representatives to support the [Delivering for America Act \(H.R. 8015\)](#), which would provide \$25 billion in immediate relief for the United States Postal Service (USPS). The House returned from recess and passed the bill on August 22 by a vote of [257-150](#).

NEA joined a [sign-on letter](#) led by the Leadership Conference on Human and Civil Rights urging lawmakers to support the Voting Rights Advancement Act (VRAA), recently reintroduced as the **John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act**. Lewis, the first Black lawmaker to lie in state in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda, helped lead the historic 1965 march for voting rights in Selma, Alabama, that led to the passage and signing of the Voting Rights Act. The House passed the VRAA in December 2019; the Senate has not taken up the bill.

Rep. Carolyn Maloney (D-NY) introduced the **Fair and Accurate Census Act (H.R. 7034)** to maintain the expanded schedule designed by Census Bureau staff to ensure all communities are fully and fairly counted despite the COVID-19 pandemic.

*\*This list is a snapshot, not comprehensive*