

U.S. SENATOR BEN CARDIN



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Dear Friend,

As U.S. COVID-19 cases surge past 5 million, we must face several stark realities. Americans are suffering in unthinkable ways and need help – now. While the House of Representatives passed a comprehensive relief package three months ago, Senate Republican leaders are proving to be both blind to urgent need and tragically unwilling to compromise on a stimulus package of their own.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell continues to try to blame others for his party's failure. Meanwhile, McConnell has advanced an inadequate proposal that contained multiple components with no connection whatsoever to COVID-19. This includes funding for a new FBI headquarters in a proven-unacceptable location in downtown Washington, where it would protect the business interests of President Donald Trump but fail to give the agency what it needs to protect this great nation.

Against this backdrop, President Trump last weekend grandiosely announced four Executive Orders purported to address the crisis. Unfortunately, [like so many of Trump's claims](#), his proposed actions come up more than a little bit short.

The president claimed to cancel payroll taxes, but his orders only temporarily deferred them, likely [saddling families with a hefty tax bill](#)

[next year](#). The president also pledged to cancel these taxes if re-elected – [a blatant attack of Social Security and Medicare](#), which depend on this funding. Even though the president has promised never to imperil either, his proposal [would in truth eviscerate the aid upon which so many seniors and vulnerable Americans absolutely need](#). This is funding Americans paid into a system during their work years, expecting it to be there for them later in life, so such a move would be as unfair as it is dishonest.

While Trump claims to have preserved Unemployment Insurance, in reality he has proposed cutting up to \$300 a week in benefits from a program that has been overwhelmingly successful in keeping millions of working families out of poverty and [keeping the economy afloat](#). The proposal also is completely unworkable for many states who may opt out because of the additional cost it puts on already struggling state budgets. This new, multi-million dollar ask of states stings particularly hard as Republicans refuse to provide state and local governments with the relief they need to provide basic services and avoid layoffs during the pandemic. President Trump's order was put together so sloppily that [it will take weeks – even months – for states to implement a new program](#), meaning millions of people could lose everything before they see a check. Even Trump's [Labor Department estimates](#) that the funding made available by Trump's order could be completely exhausted in only six weeks, providing nowhere near the help struggling Americans so badly need.

The president also claims that his orders will extend the moratorium on evictions contained in the CARES Act, but [his toothless measures actually do nothing of the sort](#). Instead, they meekly direct the Department of Health and Human Services and the Centers for Disease Control to “consider whether any measures temporarily halting residential evictions” are necessary to halt the spread of COVID-19. They also fail to provide direct money to aid tenants in distress, who will eventually have to pay months of back rent. With an estimated 20 million Americans facing the loss of their home in the coming months, such empty actions are reprehensible.

Unfortunately, the largest problems with Trump's orders is not what they do, but what they do not do.

We're not going to solve our economic problems until we solve our health problems. Despite more than 150,000 deaths, Trump and Senate Republican leaders still are unwilling to do what is necessary to provide the resources to slow the spread of the virus. That means robust funding for [COVID-19 testing](#), [contact tracing](#), and [treatment](#).

Trump's announcement would extend the student loan forbearance that Democrats fought for in the CARES Act, which is set to expire at the end of September. But it provides nowhere near the necessary levels of aid to schools to reopen safely. If we want to get parents back to work, [we must have a strong plan to keep schools from becoming COVID clusters](#).

President Trump cannot provide much-needed assistance to state and local governments by Executive Order. This money must be allocated by Congress. It is [imperative to get an infusion of funds](#) to firefighters, sanitation workers, bus drivers, health care workers, and all the people who keep our local governments running. Without action, these frontline workers could lose their jobs and [critical public services could disappear](#).

Democratic leaders are asking for \$3.6 billion to protect our democracy and ensure states can conduct free and fair elections. With more people voting by mail, additional PPE required for poll workers and reconfigured polling places to comply with social distancing, this [money is critical to ensuring everyone can vote safely and securely](#). Even President Trump has admitted as much, while making it clear that [he will continue to block the very funding that could remedy the problem](#).

Through his [attacks on the U.S. Postal Service](#), the president is making it harder for people to get their medicines, checks, important letters, and ballots. If both the application for mail ballots and the absentee ballots themselves are delayed too much, we won't have a fair election. We must have strong legislation to prevent that from happening.

The United States is experiencing the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression and the worst health crisis since the 1918 flu pandemic. A thousand Americans are dying each day.

President Trump's response: "It is what it is."

The president has no remorse for his mishandling of the crisis or empathy for those who have died or gotten sick. The real economy is failing, small businesses are closing, state and local governments are on the verge of bankruptcy, families can't pay rent and are facing eviction and can't afford to feed their kids. Executive Orders that are worth little more than the paper on which they are printed are not going to solve the problems facing America's workers and families.

The only solution is to pass a comprehensive bill that is equal to the historic health and economic catastrophe facing our country.

Big problems call for big solutions. Big headlines and half-measures that leave out millions of Americans will not do the job.

The complacency of President Trump and Senate Republican leaders is especially frustrating because we never should have reached such a traumatic point in our history. By downplaying the severity of the virus, being delinquent in developing our national testing and contract-tracing capacities, and repeatedly undercutting the advice of our public health experts, Trump and Senate Republican leaders have perpetrated a seemingly unthinkable disservice to our country.

We still can do better. I am joined by my colleagues in standing ready to help forge wide-reaching legislation that provides true relief for the Americans who need it most.

The stark reality is that President Trump and Senate Republican leaders need to get serious about compromise, and engage in good-faith negotiations that lead to lasting solutions.

Until they do, our country will continue to suffer.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ben". The signature is stylized with a large, flowing 'B' and a simple 'en'.

Ben Cardin

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