

NUCA

POLITICAL INSIDERS

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Small Business Loan Funds Run Dry – Replenishment Negotiations Ongoing

Since the start of the 2020 Coronavirus pandemic began impacting construction operations around the country, NUCA focused on ensuring that the essential services provided by utility contractors are recognized by federal and state authorities, and the NUCA members remain on the job. There was also strong support for providing loans (with possible forgiveness) for small businesses to keep employees on the payroll as the nation rides this pandemic out.

However, the \$349 billion small business loan fund created as part of the “Paycheck Protection Program.” has run out of money as of Thursday, April 16. Consequently, the Small Business Administration said it stopped accepting applications and enrolling new lenders. Demand for the loans has been extremely high, and many businesses were unable to have their applications successfully processed in time due to the first-come, first-serve nature of the program.

The program first began accepting applications on April 3, and by April 14 nearly 1.1 million applications, totaling more than \$257 billion, had been approved by the Small Business Administration.

There is bipartisan support for adding at least \$251 billion to the Paycheck Protection Program, but Democrats have been holding off to boost the stimulus to include aid for state and local governments and hospitals. Negotiations between U.S. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin and Congressional Democrats are currently ongoing, with a deal reportedly close. Over 22 million Americans have filed for unemployment benefits in the last month, with 5.25 million in the week ending April 11 alone.

Future Coronavirus Relief Efforts

For NUCA's summary of the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (H.R. 6201) and the paid leave requirements please click [here](#). For the Department of Labor's Employer fact sheet, please click [here](#). For NUCA's pandemic resources page, please click [here](#).

The return of both chambers of Congress has been delayed until May 4 over Coronavirus concerns, but that does not mean that legislation has fully stopped. It is possible for both chambers to pass new funds by unanimous consent with only a few members present, but only if no lawmaker objects. If a compromise is reached, it is likely to pass without incident in the Senate – however, the House may be forced to wait until May 4th, due to the likelihood of Rep. Thomas Massie (R-KY-04) attempting to force a roll call vote over the objections of House Republican leadership. House leadership is reportedly examining a rules change that would enable members to vote by proxy during the COVID-19 crisis, which would potentially allow for more rapid passage of emergency legislation in the future. Massie has said he would not force a roll call vote if he deems the process sufficiently transparent.

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA-12) have continued negotiating with Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin over adding an additional \$350 billion to replenish the Paycheck Protection Program small business loans. Republican Congressional leadership wanted to limit action to replenishing the PPP fund; Democrats have requested several changes to the program, as well as an additional \$250 billion for state and local governments and hospitals, more money to replenish other loan programs, and a boost to food stamp benefits.

The current package reportedly includes an additional \$310 billion for the PPP, \$75 billion for hospitals, and \$25 billion for virus testing, but does not include aid for state or local governments. The Economic Injury Disaster Loan program (EIDL), which provides financing and advances as grants of as much of \$10,000 for businesses would also receive an additional \$50 billion to \$60 billion. A House vote on the package, which has been termed “Stimulus 3.5” is expected on April 22, and the Senate will likely act before that.

Congress and the Trump Administration are continuing to discuss a potential fourth Coronavirus Relief bill, as well as a major potential infrastructure stimulus package. The Trump Administration has proposed a major \$2 trillion infrastructure package, and Congressional Democrats have done the same with a \$2 trillion package of their own. Among the priorities in the latter are items directly affecting the

utility constructions industry, including rebuilding the drinking water supply lines, the power grid, expanding broadband access, public transit systems, and expanding rail lines. Details on the administration's proposal are scarce, as progress on that front has stalled since the end of March. Virtual "information-gathering sessions" on potential water infrastructure bills are scheduled to be held beginning April 22, in the U.S. Senate. A \$500 billion fund for state and local government relief has also been proposed by a bipartisan group of Senators.

Other measures currently under consideration include additional direct cash payments to Americans, further extending and strengthening unemployment benefits, additional aid to state and local governments, and support for hospitals, community health centers, health systems, health workers, first responders, and other essential workers.

Trump, Governors Issue Guidance on Relaxing Stay-At-Home Orders

The Trump administration issued Federal guidelines to states on April 17 recommending that they document a "downward trajectory" in cases of coronavirus and flu-like illnesses before relaxing stay-at-home orders as part of a proposed three-phase reopening process.

The guidelines recommend that employers develop and implement social distancing practices, temperature checks at workplaces, testing for the virus and increased sanitation and use of disinfection. The guidelines also recommend employers ask "symptomatic" workers to be cleared to return to work by their doctors. The full guidelines were expected to be released to the public on April 17.

The president told U.S. governors on a conference call that some states would be able to reopen businesses and schools before May 1, when federal social distancing guidelines are set to expire. However, many governors are expected to continue their own state orders through June. Governors on the West Coast and in the Northeast have also formed interstate task forces to discuss potential plans for a gradual reopening.

The coronavirus outbreak is currently at a crest in the U.S., where more than 720,500 people have been infected and nearly 41,000 have died.

Washington Summit: Postponed Until September 21-23, 2020

Due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, this year's Washington Summit has been delayed to September 21-23. These issues and others will be at the forefront of our grassroots advocacy day on Capitol Hill. This is an election year, which means lawmakers will be extremely interested in hearing your thoughts and views. In these uncertain times it is more important than ever to make your voice heard.

Share your jobsite experiences and stories to persuade your lawmakers that Congress must act to improve our nation's underground infrastructure. Only you can deliver your personal expertise to your lawmaker's offices--they need to hear about what you see every day when upgrading or repairing your community's pipes, wastewater facilities, electric lines, and other important services. Those personal stories persuade lawmakers, especially when you are their constituent.

Hill office visits are scheduled to take place Wednesday, September 23, followed by a Congressional reception later that afternoon. Tuesday will see the event's legislative update session take place in the afternoon, informing the attendees of the overall industry legislative picture and plan for the following day.

Make room in your calendar to travel to Washington, D.C., this fall. For more information about our 2020 advocacy day and to register, click here: www.nuca.com/summit.

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