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Deal close for new coronavirus relief bill

WASHINGTON (AP) — Congressional negotiators are closing in on a \$900 billion COVID-19 economic relief package that would deliver additional help to businesses, \$300-per-week jobless checks and \$600 stimulus payments to most Americans. But there was no deal quite yet.

The long-delayed measure was coming together as Capitol Hill combatants finally fashioned difficult compromises, often at the expense of more ambitious Democratic wishes for the legislation, to complete the second major relief package of the coronavirus pandemic.

A hoped-for announcement Wednesday failed to materialize as lawmakers across the spectrum hammered out details of

the sprawling legislation and top negotiators continued to trade offers. But lawmakers briefed on the outlines of the aid bill freely shared them.

It's the first significant legislative response to the pandemic since the landmark CARES Act in March, which delivered \$1.8 trillion in aid and more generous jobless benefits and direct payments to individuals. Since then, Democrats have repeatedly called for ambitious further federal steps to provide relief and battle the pandemic, while Republicans have sought to more fully reopen the economy and to avoid padding the government's \$27 trillion debt.

President-elect Joe Biden is eager for an aid package to prop

up the economy and deliver direct aid to the jobless and hungry, even though the package falls short of what Democrats want. He called the emerging version "an important down payment" and promised more help next year.

Republicans, too, are anxious to approve some aid before going home for the year.

"We're still close and we're gonna get there," Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky told reporters Wednesday evening as he left the Capitol. And during a Senate GOP lunchtime call a day earlier, party leaders stressed the importance of reaching an agreement before the upcoming Georgia Senate runoff election.

The details were still being

worked out, but lawmakers in both parties said leaders had agreed on a top-line total of about \$900 billion, with direct payments of perhaps \$600 to most Americans and a \$300-per-week bonus federal unemployment benefit to partially replace a \$600-per-week benefit that expired this summer. It also includes the renewal of extra weeks of state unemployment benefits for the long-term jobless. More than \$300 billion in subsidies for business, including a second round of "paycheck protection" payments to especially hard-hit businesses, are locked in, as is \$25 billion to help struggling renters with their payments and provide food aid and farm subsidies, and a \$10 billion bail-

out for the Postal Service.

Democrats acknowledged that the removal of a \$160 billion-or-so aid package for state and local governments whose budgets have been thrown out of balance by the pandemic was a bitter loss.

"It's heartbreaking for us," said Sen. Dick Durbin of Illinois, whose state has big fiscal problems.

The emerging package was serving as a magnet for adding on other items, and the two sides continued to swap offers. It was apparent that another temporary spending bill would be needed to prevent a government shutdown at midnight on Friday. That was likely to easily pass.

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Jillian Ward, For The World

Members of the Coos Bay City Council drop off a tray of goodies to Fire Chief Mark Anderson and his department Wednesday.

Coos Bay City Council spreads holiday cheer

Staff departments thanked for their work this year

JILLIAN WARD
For The World

COOS BAY — Carolers spotted in city offices this week were

members of the Coos Bay City Council.

The council delivered trays of candy and sweets to departments throughout the city, thanking individuals for their hard work over the past year.

"I decided that we should thank the staff for the good work they've done for us as a council," said Mayor Joe Benetti as he

stood outside of the Coos Bay Fire Hall, the council's first stop on Monday morning. "I corroborated with the rest of the council, they thought it was a great idea ... and (we) created these trays."

He pointed out that the caroling was Councilwoman Lucinda DiNovo's idea.

DiNovo said this is not the first year the council has thanked

city departments, but that last year "we gave cookies" while "this year we made them."

The trays were delivered to not just the Coos Bay Fire Hall, but the Coos Bay Police Department, Finance and Public Works departments, as well as the Coos Bay Library.

"Happy holidays to everyone," Benetti said.

New jobless claims rise again, to 885,000

WASHINGTON (AP) — The number of Americans applying for unemployment benefits rose again last week to 885,000, the highest weekly total since September, as a resurgence of coronavirus cases threatens the economy's recovery from its springtime collapse.

The Labor Department said Thursday that the number of applications increased from 862,000 the previous week. It showed that nine months after the viral pandemic paralyzed the economy, many employers are still slashing jobs as the pandemic forces more business restrictions and leads many consumers to stay home. The number of claims was much higher than the 800,000 that economists had expected.

Before the coronavirus erupted in March, weekly jobless claims had typically numbered only about 225,000. The far-higher current pace reflects an employment market under stress and diminished job security for many.

The total number of people who are receiving traditional state unemployment benefits fell to 5.5 million from 5.8 million. That

figure is down sharply from its peak of nearly 23 million in May. It means that some jobless Americans are finding jobs and no longer receiving aid. But it also indicates that many of the unemployed have used up their state benefits, which typically expire after six months.

With layoffs still elevated and new confirmed viral cases in the United States now exceeding 200,000 a day on average, the economy's modest recovery is increasingly in danger. States and cities are issuing mask mandates, limiting the size of gatherings, restricting restaurant dining, closing gyms or reducing the hours and capacity of bars, stores and other businesses.

"U.S. weekly jobless claims continue to head in the wrong direction," Edward Moya, an analyst at the currency trading firm OANDA, wrote in a research note. "The labor market outlook is bleak as the winter wave of the virus is going to lead to more shutdowns."

On Wednesday, the Federal Reserve signaled that it expects the economy to rebound at a healthy pace next year as viral vaccines become widely distributed. But

Chair Jerome Powell warned that the next three to six months will likely be painful for the unemployed and small businesses as pandemic cases spike. The Fed made clear that it's prepared to keep interest rates ultra-low for the long run to help the economy withstand those threats.

Many jobless Americans are now collecting checks under two federal programs that were created this year to ease the economic pain inflicted by the pandemic. But those programs are set to expire the day after Christmas. Unless Congress acts to extend that aid, benefits will end completely for an estimated 9.1 million unemployed people.

Some federal aid appears likely to arrive soon. On Wednesday, congressional negotiators closed in on a \$900 billion COVID-19 economic relief package that would deliver additional help to businesses, \$300 per week jobless checks and \$600 stimulus payments to most Americans. But there was no deal quite yet.

The number of jobless people who are collecting aid from one of the two federal extended-benefit

programs — the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance program, which offers coverage to gig workers and others who don't qualify for traditional benefits — surged to 9.2 million from 8.6 million for the week that ended Nov. 28.

But the number of people receiving aid under the second program — the Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation program, which provides 13 weeks of federal benefits to people who have exhausted their state aid — also rose from 4.5 million to 4.8 million.

All told, 20.6 million people are now receiving some type of unemployment benefits. (Figures for the two pandemic-related programs aren't adjusted for seasonal variations.)

The pandemic has been an economic as well as a health disaster. In March and April, employers slashed a dizzying 22 million jobs after the virus and the measures meant to contain it brought normal business activity to a halt. The nation's gross domestic product — the broadest measure of economic output — plummeted from April to June at a record annual rate of 31.4%.

Fed keeps interest rates low

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Federal Reserve said Wednesday that it will keep buying government bonds until the economy makes "substantial" progress, a step intended to reassure financial markets and keep long-term borrowing rates low indefinitely.

The Fed also reiterated after its latest policy meeting that it expects to keep its benchmark short-term interest rate near zero through at least 2023. The Fed has kept its key rate there since March, when it took a range of extraordinary steps to fight the pandemic recession by keeping credit flowing.

Chair Jerome Powell said he and other Fed officials expect the economy to rebound at a healthy pace next year as viral vaccines become widely distributed. But the next three to six months will likely be painful for the unemployed and small businesses as pandemic cases spike, Powell said at a news conference.

In a statement and in Powell's answers to reporters, the Fed signaled that it's prepared to keep rates ultra-low for the long run to help the economy withstand those threats and sustain a recovery. Yet Powell also pointedly stressed the need for further rescue aid from Congress to ease the impact of increased apartment evictions and business failures, and he expressed optimism about the deal under consideration by Congress.

"The case for fiscal policy right now is very, very strong," Powell said, "and I think that is widely understood now. It's a very positive thing that we may finally be getting that."

Congressional leaders appear to be nearing agreement on a \$900 billion relief package that would provide extended unemployment benefits, more loans for small businesses and possibly another round of stimulus checks for individual Americans.

"Ongoing fiscal negotiations are more important than anything the Fed did today," said Eric Winograd, U.S. economist at asset manager AllianceBernstein.

The Fed's policymakers made just one notable change to the statement they issue after each meeting. On Wednesday, they said the central bank will continue to buy at least \$80 billion of Treasuries and \$40 billion of mortgage-backed securities a month "until substantial further progress has been made" toward the Fed's goals of maximum employment and stable prices.

Those purchases are intended to hold down longer-term rates, including borrowing costs for mortgages, auto loans and some business loans. Previously, the Fed had said only that the purchases would continue "over coming months." The new guidance suggests that the bond buys will continue indefinitely.

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Oregon reports 48 more deaths due to COVID-19

THE WORLD

With a second straight high number of reported deaths Wednesday, Oregon's two-day total was over 100 as the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic continues to surge in the state.

The Oregon Health Authority reported 48 deaths Wednesday after reporting 54 Tuesday. Prior to Tuesday, the daily high was 36.

In addition, 34 of Oregon's 36 counties had at least one new confirmed or presumptive case and the state had 1,562 in all, bringing the total as of 12:01 a.m. Wednesday to 97,622. The state's death toll stands at 1,262.

Prior to the two high-count days, the state had a better week, with a drop in overall cases and deaths from the previous week.

Oregon Health Authority said every death is a sad reminder of the danger posed by the virus and of the need, even with vaccines now becoming available, for Oregonians to continue taking steps to stem the spread of the virus, including:

- Maintain 6 feet of physical distance.
- Wear a face covering when outside the house.
- Practice good hand hygiene.
- Avoid gatherings with

non-household members.

• If you have symptoms, consult with a medical provider quickly to get instructions on how to care for yourself and your household members and whether to get tested.

The surge in the number of deaths was a result both of the steadily high daily case counts and also the manner of processing death reports. The counting of deaths from death certificates can take additional time because they are determined by physicians and then sent to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for further review and confirmation. The information is then reported back to the states.

In Wednesday's report, for example, seven of the people were from Yamhill County and died in their residences.

COVID-19 hospitalizations

The number of hospitalized patients in Oregon Wednesday morning was 554, 10 more than Tuesday. There were 113 in intensive care unit beds, an increase of one.

Weekly report

The weekly report released by Oregon Health Authority on Wednesday, which did not include numbers from Tuesday or Wednesday, showed a drop

in weekly cases, deaths and hospitalizations.

OHA reported 9,222 new cases for the week of Dec. 7-13, an 11% decrease from the previous week. That ended a stretch of seven straight weeks with higher counts.

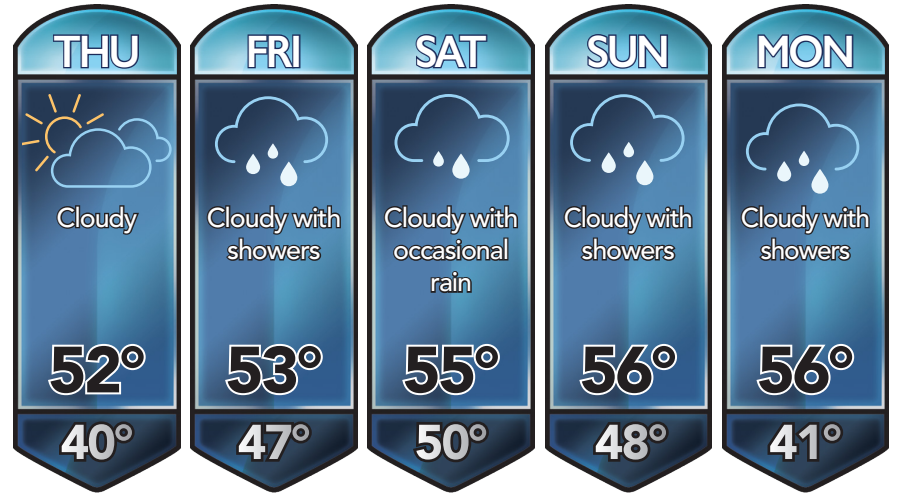
In addition, 491 people were hospitalized, a slight decrease, and there were 116 reported deaths, down from 133.

People ages 20 to 49 have accounted for 55% of the cases, while people 70 and older have accounted for 76% of the deaths.

There were fewer tests for COVID-19 reported during the week, 149,243 (down from 170,964). The positive rate also was lower, at 7.4%.

Cases

New cases reported Wednesday were in the following counties: Baker (7), Benton (31), Clackamas (166), Clatsop (7), Columbia (5), Coos (11), Crook (4), Curry (3), Deschutes (50), Douglas (16), Gilliam (2), Harney (4), Hood River (16), Jackson (64), Jefferson (29), Josephine (29), Klamath (20), Lake (2), Lane (105), Lincoln (5), Linn (51), Malheur (16), Marion (183), Morrow (8), Multnomah (455), Polk (30), Sherman (2), Tillamook (12), Umatilla (34), Union (9), Wallowa (1), Wasco (4), Washington (148) and Yamhill (33).



Health officials track safety as COVID-19 vaccines roll out

ASSOCIATED PRESS

As COVID-19 vaccinations roll out to more and more people, health authorities are keeping close watch for any unexpected side effects.

On Tuesday, a health worker in Alaska suffered a severe allergic reaction after receiving the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine. She is in the hospital for another night under observation while another worker, vaccinated Wednesday, has recovered. Doctors already knew to be on the lookout after Britain reported two similar cases last week.

In the U.S., vaccine recipients are supposed to hang around after the injection in case signs of an allergy appear and they need immediate treatment — exactly what happened when the health worker in Juneau became flushed and short of breath 10 minutes after the shot. The second worker experienced eye puffiness, light headedness and scratchy throat.

Allergies are always a question with a new medical product, but monitoring COVID-19 vaccines for any other, unexpected side effects is a bigger challenge than usual. It's not just because so many people need to be vaccinated over the next year. Never before have so many vaccines made in different ways converged at the same time — and it's possible that one shot option will come with different side effects than another.

The first vaccine beginning widespread use in the U.S. and many Western countries, made by Pfizer Inc. and Germany's BioNTech, and a second option expected soon from competitor Moderna Inc. both are made the same way. The Food and Drug Administration says huge studies of each have uncovered no major safety risks.

But the allergy concern "points out again the importance of real-time safety monitoring," said Dr. Jesse Goodman of Georgetown University, a former FDA vaccine chief.

And authorities have multiple ways of tracking

how people fare as these COVID-19 vaccines, and hopefully additional ones in coming months, get into more arms.

HOW WILL I FEEL AFTER VACCINATION?

Getting either the Pfizer-BioNTech shot or the Moderna version can cause some temporary discomfort, just like many vaccines do.

In addition to a sore arm, people can experience a fever and some flu-like symptoms — fatigue, aches, chills, headache. They last about a day, sometimes bad enough that recipients miss work, and are more common after the second dose and in younger people.

These reactions are a sign that the immune system is revving up. COVID-19 vaccines tend to cause more of those reactions than a flu shot, about what people experience with shingles vaccinations. But some are similar to early coronavirus symptoms, one reason hospitals are staggering when their employees get vaccinated.

WHAT ABOUT SERIOUS RISKS?

The FDA found no serious side effects in the tens of thousands enrolled in studies of the two vaccines.

Still, problems so rare they don't occur in even very large studies sometimes crop up when a vaccine is used more widely and without the stringent rules of a clinical trial.

The first allergy reports from England were in people with a history of serious allergies, and British authorities warned those with severe prior experiences to hold off vaccination as they determine what ingredient might be a problem.

U.S. health authorities are giving more nuanced advice. People always are asked about allergies before vaccinations, and instructions for the Pfizer-BioNTech shot say avoid it if you're severely allergic to one of its ingredients or had a severe reaction to a prior dose. Health workers can go over the ingredient list.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention advises people to stick around for 15 minutes after vaccination, and those with a history of other allergies for 30 minutes, so they can be treated immediately if they have a reaction.

The Alaska health worker, who doctors said had no history of allergies, was following that advice and got prompt care for a particularly severe reaction called anaphylaxis. She has recovered after a night of observation in the hospital — but won't be allowed a second vaccine dose.

Alaska doctors alerted U.S. authorities, who will continue the monitoring required to tell just how common this kind of reaction really is. That will be especially important as enough vaccine arrives for injections to be given outside of health care settings that have lots of experience handling this type of reaction.

"Balancing any potential risks with the benefits the vaccine provides in the pandemic is an ongoing process," CDC's Dr. Jay Butler cautioned Wednesday.

WHAT IF OTHER RISKS CROP UP?

The challenge is telling whether the vaccine caused a health problem or if it's coincidence. Don't jump to conclusions that there's a connection, health authorities stress.

The way to tell: Comparing any reports of possible side effects with data showing how often that same condition occurs routinely in the population.

The government has multiple ways to do that. Doctors are required to report any patient problems. But the FDA is scrutinizing massive databases of insurance claims for early red flags that any health problems are occurring more often in the newly vaccinated than everyone else.

On its list to check is Bell's palsy, a temporary facial paralysis that occurred in a handful of people in both vaccine studies. The FDA said it's probably coincidence, but will track to be sure.

First COVID-19 vaccinations begin in Oregon hospitals

PORTLAND (AP) — Oregon hospitals administered the first coronavirus vaccines in the state Wednesday to nurses, respiratory therapists, housekeeping workers and other health care employees in high-risk jobs, marking the beginning of a broad vaccination campaign in a state that's seen more than 1,200 COVID-19 deaths since the pandemic began.

Those vaccinated during the coordinated event — streamed live over the internet — were from Legacy Health System and Oregon Health & Science University in Portland and Saint Alphonsus Medical Center on the Oregon-Idaho border. Vaccine shipments to other hospitals, including Salem Hospital, will continue to arrive this week.

The Oregon Health Authority has said it will receive 35,100 initial doses of the Pfizer vaccine that has been approved by federal and Western state authorities. Another vac-

cine made by Moderna is expected to receive federal approval soon and Oregon officials estimate there will be enough of the two vaccines to initially inoculate about 100,000 people statewide.

On Wednesday, the vaccinations kicked off at Legacy Health in Portland with five health care workers, including an emergency room nurse, an intensive care unit nurse, a respiratory therapist, the head of housekeeping services and a radiologist.

After a countdown, the recipients' colleagues burst into cheers and applause as the needles pierced their arms. Some gave high fives.

"I'm taking this vaccine for my family as well as for my community," said Mayra Gomez, an ICU nurse. "I want to lead by example."

At OHSU, the first COVID vaccine was administered to an ICU nurse by a dental resident under a new Oregon law

that allows dentists and dental students to administer shots.

And far to the east, along the Oregon-Idaho border, the chief of nursing at Saint Alphonsus Hospital in Ontario, Oregon, rolled up her sleeve for one of the initial vaccines at her facility.

Dina Ellwanger, who is also the hospital's president, said after receiving the shot, she would return to a COVID-19 vaccination clinic the hospital had set up to allow nurses and other health care workers to get their shots without missing too much work. The vaccine comes at a critical time for rural communities like Ontario, which has been hit hard by the coronavirus.

"Our spread has been very high. We border Idaho where safety measures have not been as strict," she said, adding that 20 people at the hospital had already been vaccinated by 11 a.m.

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Farmers ordered to pay back wages over worker COVID-19 quarantines

SALEM (AP) — Three area farmers have been ordered to pay more than \$11,000 in back wages after denying paid sick leave to employees who were advised to self-quarantine following potential COVID-19 exposure.

The U.S. Department of Labor's Wage and Hour

Division ordered Coleman Agriculture in Gervais to pay seven employees \$8,878; St. Joseph Orchard Inc. in McMinnville to pay four employees \$1,820 and J Farms LLC to pay one employee \$720, the Statesman Journal reported.

The paid sick leave is required by the federal

Families First Coronavirus Response Act. The Act gives tax credits to businesses with fewer than 500 employees for employee paid leave for the employee's health needs or to care for family members.

It wasn't immediately known if the farmers can appeal the order.

NORTHWEST STOCKS

Closing and 8:30 a.m. quotes	NW Natural 50.50 51.82	Levi Strauss 21.35 21.48
Stock	Skywest 43.26 42.44	Dow Jones closed at 30,147.79
Intel 51.12 50.28	Starbucks 103.27 103.33	NASDAQ closed at 12,657.68
Kroger 30.97 30.93	Umpqua Hldgs 15.09 14.80	S&P 500 closed at 3,701.18
Microsoft 219.06 218.51	Weyerhaeuser 33.91 34.49	Provided by Coos Bay Edward Jones
Nike 138.38 139.92	Xerox 23.03 22.75	

LOTTERY

MegaMillions Dec. 15 1-10-18-20-46 Megaball: 15 Multiplier: x2 Jackpot: \$310 million	Powerball Dec. 16 4-23-37-61-67 Powerball: 7 Multiplier: x2 Jackpot: \$304 million	Megabucks Dec. 16 13-15-18-31-34-42 Jackpot: \$5.9 Million	Win For Life Dec. 16 1-11-30-61
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States grapple with next steps on evictions

CORVALLIS (AP) — Ryan Bowser looked somber as he sat in his cramped Oregon apartment, worried whether he, his pregnant girlfriend and her 10-year-old daughter would have a roof over their heads in the new year. It may well depend on state lawmakers.

The family is three months behind on the \$1,165 in rent they pay for their two-bedroom unit in the college town of Corvallis. Bowser, a custodian at Oregon State University, took eight weeks off because he was sick and couldn't afford child care.

They're among thousands hoping Oregon extends an eviction moratorium until July 1 in a special legislative session next week. The proposal also would create a \$200 million fund mainly to compensate landlords. If passed, it would go further than a one-month extension of a federal eviction moratorium expected in a coronavirus relief package nearing consensus in Congress.

"We are forced to make decisions between which bills to pay — rent, car or groceries," said Bowser, adding that they may have to sleep in their car, stay on friends' couches or move to another state to crash with distant relatives. "We don't know if we will have a home next year."

The plight of Bowser and other

renters on the edge foreshadows a national crisis that's expected to grow next year, with states and cities that granted renters a reprieve amid the coronavirus-battered economy now wrestling with what comes next. While states like Oregon and California are trying to pass much longer moratoriums, some don't have more protections in the works.

"This has the potential of being the biggest housing crisis of our lifetime," said David Dworkin, president and CEO of the National Housing Conference, a nonprofit dedicated to affordable housing for all Americans.

About one-third of U.S. households say they're behind on rent or mortgage payments and likely to face eviction or foreclosure in the next two months, according to data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau.

Eyes are on congressional leaders who are closing in on a massive COVID-19 relief package, including an extension of the federal eviction moratorium until February and \$25 billion in rental assistance as well as a new round of stimulus checks, bonus unemployment benefits and many other efforts to deliver aid.

Eviction moratoriums instituted by 44 states beginning in March have mostly expired. In response, the Centers for

Disease Control and Prevention issued the federal moratorium in September that broadly prevents evictions through the end of 2020. The nationwide directive was seen as the best hope to prevent more than 23 million renters from being displaced.

Now, some states want to extend eviction bans further than the federal government. Lawmakers in heavily Democratic California are proposing their moratorium last until 2022, as long as renters pay at least 25% of their rent and attest to financial hardship.

And a six-month extension is the top issue for the Democratic-led Oregon Legislature in a special session Monday. Its one of 15 states where eviction moratoriums are now in place through year's end, according to the Eviction Lab at Princeton University.

"The consequences of not acting before the expiration of the eviction moratorium would be catastrophic," said Rep. Julie Fahey, a Democrat from the city of Eugene who helped write the proposal.

A main sticking point is that for landlords to receive back rent through a proposed compensation fund, they must forgo 20% of past-due payments. A Republican leader called it "dramatically

unfair."

"It's not right to tell (landlords) that they have to pay to get support when the government is the one who asked them to share this responsibility and bear this burden to keep renters housed, which they have done that," said Rep. Christine Drazan, leader of the House Republican Caucus.

Democratic Senate President Peter Courtney said there will be "some concerns, but I am convinced that we will pass something."

While moratoriums have helped people stay in their homes during the pandemic, experts warn that extending them isn't a long-term solution.

"This is just kicking the can down the road, because it doesn't actually pay the rent," Dworkin said. "If a tenant cannot afford to pay three months of rent or one month of rent, then they are not going to be able to pay nine or 12 months of rent — and they are eventually going to get evicted unless we pay their rent."

He suggests states fund efforts that cover both rent and back payments for landlords. Through October, the National Low Income Housing Coalition estimated states and cities have set aside over \$4 billion for rental assistance — far less than what they say is needed.

Like Oregon, Hawaii, Nebraska and New Jersey are among those offering payments to landlords for missed rent.

But with states' tax revenue shrinking during the pandemic and recession, expensive efforts to combat the eviction crisis are further straining resources.

"States are under severe stress themselves financially," Dworkin said. "In many ways, the states are being put in the situation of robbing Peter to pay Paul."

Bowser said delays by lawmakers, locally and nationally, have crippled his family.

"All (lawmakers) have to do right now in this situation is the bare minimum to keep people in their homes," Bowser said.

He and his girlfriend, Taylor Wood, have closely followed updates on possible extensions to state and federal moratoriums as they debate which bills to pay that month and which necessities to sacrifice. They're desperately developing a plan for what to do if they find an eviction notice tacked to their door in the new year.

"It's frustrating, and I know we are not the only people in this situation — there are thousands like us," Wood said. "I just keep thinking, 'Well, (lawmakers) won't just let us go homeless ... right?'"

Record-breaking snowfall blankets Northeast in first winter storm

ASSOCIATED PRESS

A large swath of the Northeast was blanketed in snow by the first major storm of the season, which smashed a decades-old snowfall record in Pennsylvania.

"Williamsport Regional Airport made history," the National Weather Service in State College said, reporting 24.7 inches of snow. Forecasters said that was the most snow from a single storm on record, breaking the

previous record of 24.1 inches set there in January 1964.

Much of the Pennsylvania's western and central regions saw accumulations in the double digits.

Boston reported a record 9.1 inches falling

since midnight on Wednesday, a meteorologist at the National Weather Service in Norton, Massachusetts, said.

"That is the new record right now, and it will probably be more before it's done," Bryce Williams

said. The previous record for snow fall on Dec. 17 was recorded in 2013 when 6.4 inches fell in Boston.

High elevations in the Berkshires saw the most snow, more than 1 foot, in Massachusetts. Moderate to heavy snowfall is fore-

cast through Thursday afternoon, with another 3 to 4 inches accumulating before slowly tapering off.

Williams also warned of "a flash freeze situation" that could cause dangerous road conditions.

Bill

From Page 1

House lawmakers returned to Washington on Wednesday in hopes of a vote soon on the broader package, which would combine the COVID-19 relief with a \$1.4 trillion governmentwide funding bill and a host of other remaining congressional business, including extending expiring tax breaks and passing other unfinished legislation.

Negotiations intensified on Tuesday after months of futility. Before the election, with Democrats riding high in the polls, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi took a hard line for more aid. Now, McConnell is playing a strong hand after a better-than-expected performance in the elections limited GOP losses in Senate races.

The frightening, record surge in COVID caseloads and deaths, combined with troubling economic indicators, however, is mandating an agreement, though the emerging package contains less economic stimulus than the March aid bill.

"The case for fiscal policy right now is very, very strong," Federal Reserve Board Chairman Jerome Powell said Wednesday. "I think that is widely understood now. It's a very positive thing that we may finally be getting that."

McConnell successfully pushed to get Democrats to drop their much-sought \$160 billion state and local government aid package while giving up a key priority of his own — a liability shield for businesses and other institutions like universities fearing COVID-19 lawsuits. Democrats cited other gains for states and localities in the emerging deal such as help for transit systems, schools and vaccine distribution.

The addition of the \$600 direct payments came after recent endorsements from both President Donald Trump and progressives including Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., who remains dissatisfied about the overall package.

"Everything that is in that package is vitally needed," Sanders said Wednesday on MSNBC. "The problem is that it is a much smaller package than the country needs in this moment of eco-

nomics desperation."

A poisonous dynamic has long infected the negotiations, but the mood was businesslike in two meetings in Pelosi's Capitol suite Tuesday that resulted in a burst of progress.

Pressure for a deal is intense. Unemployment benefits run out Dec. 26 for more than 10 million people. Many businesses are barely hanging on after nine months of the pandemic. And money is needed to distribute new vaccines that are finally offering hope for returning the country to a semblance of normalcy.

The looming agreement follows efforts by a bipartisan group of rank-and-file lawmakers to find middle ground between a \$2.4 trillion House bill and a \$500 billion GOP measure fashioned by McConnell.

Their \$908 billion proposal has served as a template for the talks, although the bipartisan group, led by Sens. Joe Manchin, D-W. Va., and Susan Collins, R-Maine, favored aid to states and localities instead of another round of stimulus payments. The CARES Act provided for \$1,200 payments per individual and \$500 per child.

At his news conference, Powell acknowledged that challenge.

"The case numbers are so high and so widespread across the country ... this will have the effect of suppressing activity," he said, particularly in-person services such as eating out and traveling.

"At the same time, people are getting vaccinated, now," he added. "You have to think sometime in the middle of next year, you'll see people comfortable going out and engaging in a broader range of activities."

Recent economic reports have generally reflected a sharply slowing recovery. On Wednesday, the Commerce Department reported the sharpest drop in retail sales in seven months. Americans held back on spending in November at the start of the holiday shopping season, which typically accounts for a quarter or more of retailers' annual sales.

picture for next year. Their upgrades likely reflect the expected impact of new coronavirus vaccines. The officials now foresee the economy contracting 2.4% this year, less than the 3.7% decline it envisioned in September. For next year, in anticipation of a rebound, the officials have upgraded their growth forecast from 4% to 4.2%.

By the end of 2021, the Fed expects the unemployment rate to fall to 5% from the current 6.7% — lower than the 5.5% rate it had forecast in September.

The Fed's latest policy statement coincides with an economy that is stumbling and might even shrink over the winter as the raging pandemic forces new business restrictions and keeps many consumers at home. Weighing the bleak short-term outlook and the brighter long-term picture has complicated the Fed's policymaking as it assesses how much more stimulus to pursue.

Rates

From Page 1

"The key message is still that policy will remain unusually accommodative — with near-zero rates and asset purchases — continuing for several more years," said Paul Ashworth, chief U.S. economist for Capital Economics.

Some economists faulted the phrasing as too evasive. More precise guidance might prevent financial markets from anticipating an end to the purchases before the Fed intends to reduce them.

"The Fed's forward guidance is disappointingly vague," Winograd said, and could lead investors to force up interest rates sooner than the Fed would prefer.

In quarterly economic projections that the policy-makers issued Wednesday, they painted a brighter

Moon rocks in hand, China looks to future lunar missions

BEIJING (AP) — Following the successful return of moon rocks by its Chang'e 5 robotic probe, China is preparing for future missions that could set the stage for an eventual lunar base to host human explorers, a top space program official said Thursday.

China's next three lunar missions are on track, along with programs for returning samples from Mars and exploring asteroids and the planet Jupiter, Deputy Chief Commander

of the China Lunar Exploration Program Wu Yanhua said.

"Exploring the truth of the universe is just beginning," Wu said at a news conference held hours after the Chang'e 5's capsule parachuted to a landing in Inner Mongolia carrying the first lunar samples to be brought to Earth in more than 40 years.

Named after the Chinese goddess of the moon, the Chang'e program has made three landings there, including

on its less explored far side. Chang'e 6, scheduled for a 2023 launch, is to collect more samples from the lunar south pole, while its two successors are to conduct detailed surveys and test technologies needed for the construction of a science base on the moon.

No dates have been given for Chang'e 7 and 8, or for a crewed mission to the moon that China says is in the works, or for the construction of a lunar base.

DEAR ABBY By Abigail Van Buren

EX COMES BACK FOR A SECOND CHANCE AFTER BEING REJECTED

DEAR ABBY: My ex had a prior relationship with my cousin "Earl." When she talked about her past relationships, a common theme emerged. Her partners were emotionally abusive -- cheating, berating her, throwing rage fits where they screamed in her face and threw things. My own history is similar. My partners have done the same to me. (I do not engage in such behavior.)

Earl told her he still has feelings for her, despite the emotional abuse he had inflicted upon her. I confronted him and told him that what he did was inappropriate. Abby, when she heard about it, she dumped me and tried to get back together with Earl!

My cousin, having done work to remedy his issues, rejected her outright. He told her it would never work between them despite the lingering feelings. Now she has come back to me, saying she wants a serious relationship. Should I take her back? -- SO MIXED-UP

DEAR SO MIXED-UP: Heck no. This woman has made clear that you are her second choice. Please don't take her up on her offer. You can't fix what's wrong with this very mixed-up woman, and you shouldn't waste your time trying because if you do, she will only cause you more pain.

DEAR ABBY: My husband is smart, hard-working and a wonderful father to our young son. We hope to grow our family. However, my husband is a cigarette smoker and extremely defensive about any suggestion about him possibly quitting.

Both of his parents passed away from cancer relatively young, and his mother was a smoker, too. I'm terrified he will get sick and die young. Not only that, he constantly misses precious moments

with our son, who stands at the window and cries when he sees his father go outside. I'm becoming resentful of the constant breaks he takes while I sit inside comforting our son.

I have tried reasoning with him and suggesting we ask a doctor for help, but he shuts me down and gets angry. How can I try to approach it again? -- ANTI-SMOKER IN COLORADO

DEAR ANTI-SMOKER: You fell in love with an addict. Your husband is addicted to tobacco and appears not to understand or care about how it may affect himself or you and his son in the coming years. My advice would be to stop pressuring your husband for now and ask your doctor to refer you to a support group for friends and family members of people with a smoking addiction.

DEAR ABBY: A man and a woman liked (and loved) each other in their teenage years, but they married different people. After a decade, the man sends wedding anniversary wishes to the woman on Facebook. Without any reply, the next day the woman blocks the man, and on the second day she deactivates her account on FB. What does it mean? -- MYSTIFIED IN THE MIDDLE EAST

DEAR MYSTIFIED: It means the long-ago chapter of your storybook teen romance is over. She has moved on and so should you.

Dear Abby is written by Abigail Van Buren, also known as Jeanne Phillips, and was founded by her mother, Pauline Phillips. Contact Dear Abby at www.DearAbby.com or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, CA 90069.



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Oregon signing class among top 10 in nation

UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

If the foundation of an elite program is elite talent, then the Oregon football program under Mario Cristobal is on solid ground.

The Ducks are on track for the best recruiting class in school history after adding 20 players Wednesday, the first day of college football's recently implemented early signing period. Two years after signing the first consensus top-10 class ever at Oregon, Cristobal and his staff are on track to raise the bar with a class that some consider among the top five in the country.

The end goal is to compete for national championships with the likes of Alabama, Clemson and Ohio State. That means competing for talent at the same level as those programs, which the Ducks are doing the last three years under Cristobal.

"We're getting closer to where the roster needs to look like," Cristobal said. "I think we're approaching there."

Headlined by top-10 recruits including quarterback Ty Thompson and offensive lineman Kingsley Suamataia, Oregon's class was rated No. 5 nationally by Rivals as of Wednesday evening, and No. 6 according to ESPN and 247Sports. There's the chance for movement in the coming weeks, as the Ducks look to augment this class with a few more signees during the traditional signing period in February.

Either way, this is on track to be the most highly rated recruiting class in UO history. That's remarkable in its own right,

but particularly so given that it was assembled during a global pandemic.

That forced the Ducks to conduct much of their recruiting efforts virtually the last several months, but it also had them appreciating some fortuitous timing. Their junior day, when players including Thompson and tight end Moliki Mataavao visited campus, was held just before the pandemic brought the country to a halt in March.

"Having the opportunity to have them here, and have them watch us practice and the way we operate, to me is almost more important than having them here for a game, when it's all the bell and whistles, and the fun stuff, and the crowd," Cristobal said.

The class had some obvious positional priorities, including the offensive line, where the Ducks signed Suamataia along with Jackson Light, Jonah Miller and Bram Walden. There are also three receivers — Isaiah Brevard, Troy Franklin and Dont'e Thornton — who all stand at least 6-foot-2 and are considered top-100 players in the country by at least one scouting service.

"We want to be a big, fast, physical football team, at every position," Cristobal said. "This certainly fits that criteria. These (receivers) are physical guys. They're explosive guys that can make you miss. They have unbelievable ball skills."

"They're mismatch nightmares, is what they are."

The quarterback who will throw to those wideouts — and also big, athletic tight ends Mataavao and Terrance Ferguson

— is Thompson. The No. 1 rated recruit from the state of Arizona, Thompson was a five-star prospect according to Rivals.

"He can do it all," Cristobal said. "And he has the makeup to match. ... Inside and out, he's just a true champion."

Thompson was one of four recruits from Arizona signed by the Ducks on Wednesday. According to 247Sports, Oregon signed players rated No. 1 (Thompson), No. 2 (Walden) and No. 5 (Miller) from that state in this recruiting cycle, along with outside linebacker Brandon Buckner.

"The state of Arizona has awesome football, incredible football," Cristobal said. "High-level coaching, high-level teaching and development. You're looking at a place that we feel we have to recruit extremely well, extremely hard, because of the caliber of talent, the caliber of coaching."

Thompson also was one of six players signed by Oregon rated No. 1 in their respective home states this year, according to 247Sports. The Ducks also signed the top-rated players from Utah (Suamataia), Nevada (Mataavao), Colorado (Ferguson), New York (all-purpose back Seven McGee) and of course the top-rated in-state prospect, linebacker Keith Brown of Lebanon.

In all, 17 of Oregon's signees are rated either as five-star or four-star recruits by various recruiting services.

Oregon Signees

Darren Barkins, cb, 6-0, 170, Mater Dei Catholic, Chula Vista, Calif.
Jeffrey Bassa, s, 6-3, 200, Kearns,

Salt Lake City, Utah
Isaiah Brevard, wr, 6-4, 200, Southaven, Southaven, Miss.

Keith Brown, ilb, 6-1, 220, Lebanon, Lebanon, Ore.

Brandon Buckner, olb, 6-1, 234, Chandler, Chandler, Ariz.

Daymon David, s, 6-1, 178, Franklin, Reisterstown, Md.

Jaylin Davies, cb, 6-1, 165, Mater Dei, Santa Ana, Calif.

Terrance Ferguson, te, 6-5, 230, Heritage, Littleton, Colo.

Troy Franklin, wr, 6-2, 170, Menlo-Atherton, Menlo Park, Calif.

Jackson Light, oc, 6-3, 284, Corner Canyon, Draper, Utah

Moliki Mataavao, te, 6-6, 240, Liberty, Henderson, Nev.

Seven McGee, apb, 5-8, 167, East, Rochester, N.Y.

Jabril McNeill, olb, 6-4, 225, Sander- son, Raleigh, N.C.

Jonah Miller, og, 6-6.5, 260, Sahu- ro, Tucson, Ariz.

Kingsley Suamataia, ot, 6-5, 280, Orem, Orem, Utah

Ty Thompson, pro, 6-4, 215, Mes- quite, Gilbert, Ariz.

Dont'e Thornton, wr, 6-4.5, 185, Mount Saint Joseph, Baltimore, Md.

Terrell Timon, wde, 6-4, 210, Mans- field Timberview, Arlington, Texas

Bram Walden, ot, 6-4, 270, Saguaro, Scottsdale, Ariz.

Keanu Williams, sde, 6-5, 290, Clo- vis, Clovis, Calif.

Oregon State

The Beavers signed 11 players on Wednesday, including eight with three-star ratings from recruiting services.

J.T. Byrne, a tight end from Carmel, Calif.; Henry Buckles, an offensive lineman from Hood River; Arnez Madison, a defensive back from Los Angeles; Damir Collins, one of the nation's top all-purpose running backs, from Jefferson High School in Portland; Easton Mascarenas, a linebacker from Mission Viejo, Calif.; Omarion Fa'amoe, a defensive lineman

from Salt Lake City; Jimmy Valsin III, a wide receiver from Arlington, Texas; and Sam Vidlak, a quarterback from Hidden Valley High School in Grants Pass.

"We're so excited about the group we are adding to our roster," Oregon State head coach Johnathan Smith said.

He expected the class to be small since the Beavers don't have a large senior class and said the school could add a few additional players in the traditional signing period in February.

Smith had good things to say about all three in-state players. He envisions Buckles as being a center in the future with his ability to move and his intelligence and said Vidlak as a player the coaching staff kept coming back to among various quarterbacks they analyzed.

As for Collins, Smith said, "We're anxious to see how many ways we can use him in the offense. He is dynamic with the ball in his hands."

Oregon State Signees

Jake Blair, qb, 6-3, 190, Camas, Camas, Wash.

Henry Buckles, og, 6-2, 285, Hood River Valley, Hood River, Ore.

J.T. Byrne, te, 6-6, 238, Carmel, Carmel, Calif.

Damir Collins, apb, 5-9, 185, Jefferson, Portland, Ore.

Omarion Fa'amoe, wde, 6-2, 255, West, Salt Lake City, Utah

Arnez Madison, cb, 6-2, 170, Manual Arts Senior, Los Angeles, Calif.

Easton Mascarenas, ilb, 6-0, 215, Mission Viejo, Mission Viejo, Calif.

Jake Parrrella, olb, 6-4, 215, Lutheran West, Cleveland, Ohio.

Semisi Saluni, olb, 6-4, 252, Northgate, Concord, Calif.

Jimmy Valsin, wr, 6-3, 180, Bowie, Arlington, Texas

Pro Picks: Chargers meet Raiders in Thursday game

BARRY WILNER

Associated Press

After the worst week for Pro Picks all season — we looked like the Saints, as in unprepared — our confidence isn't shaken. Well, not too much.

Having to start with the slumping Raiders hosting the who-knows-what-they-are Chargers is not the most enticing way to rebound. It's difficult to find the positives in Sin City — there's an understatement to some — but clearly Jon Gruden recognized the defensive deficiencies of his team by firing coordinator Paul Guenther.

"We have to do everything better, honestly," Gruden said of his defense. "Not just one kind of run. Inside runs, outside runs, the run game. With that said, you have to stop the play-action pass and we have to stop a lot of other things that have been problematic. We've got a lot of work to do, but we have good players here."

As for the Chargers, sure they beat Atlanta last weekend, with the Falcons pretty much handing over the win. And they tend to play some better teams close.

Las Vegas, No. 16 in the AP Pro32, is a 3 1-2 point favorite over the No. 26 Chargers. Some lukewarm support for Gruden's bunch.

RAIDERS, 27-22

KNOCKOUT POOL: At least we got this right in Week 14 with the Seahawks. That leaves us pulling for TENNESSEE.

New York Jets (plus 16) at Los Angeles

Owners delay decision on 17-game season

BARRY WILNER

Associated Press

NFL owners have delayed a decision on implementing a 17-game regular season for 2021.

During a teleconference call Wednesday that replaced the usual December gathering of owners in Dallas, they opted to push back any move on the expanded season until early in 2021. The NFL and the players' union agreed during collective bargaining talks earlier this year to adding one regular-season game to the schedule, but not before next season.

"We had a lengthy discussion on this, obviously it's an important decision for us," Commissioner Roger Goodell said. "We did not take any votes with respect to committing to do it. In the collective

bargaining agreement, we have that right to do it."

A scheduling formula for a 17th game was approved unanimously: an interconference matchup, based on divisional standings from the preceding season, and on a rotating divisional basis. The idea is to maintain facilitating competitive fairness; creating additional value through quality matchups; and preserving the objectivity of the scheduling process, the league said.

"It obviously comes into play with respect with our future media arrangements that we obviously are contemplating," he added. "We expect a decision will be made on that in the next several weeks."

The length of the preseason would be reduced, as well, if a 17th match is added.

24-21

Buffalo (minus 6) at Denver, Saturday: Think the Broncos regret they ignored that QB in Wyoming, Josh Allen, back in 2018? ... BILLS, 27-15

Carolina (plus 8 1/2) at Green Bay, Saturday: The Packers have their sights set on that lone NFC playoffs bye ... PACKERS, 30-19

Cleveland (minus 3 1/2) at New York Giants: A letdown by the Browns would

Rams: Yes, this is a case of piling it on, exactly what the Rams will do to the winless New Yorkers ... BEST BET: RAMS, 40-10

New England (plus 3) at Miami: The Dolphins usually do well at home vs. the Patriots, but they are so undermanned ... UPSET SPECIAL, PATRIOTS 20-16

Kansas City (minus 3 1/2) at New Orleans: It's unfair to pick this game without knowing Drew Brees' status ... CHIEFS,

MLB reclassifies Negro Leagues as major league

NEW YORK (AP) — Willie Mays will add some hits to his record, Monte Irvin's big league batting average should climb over .300 and Satchel Paige may add nearly 150 victories to his total.

Josh Gibson, the greatest of all Negro League sluggers, might just wind up with a major league record, too.

The statistics and records of greats like Gibson, Paige and roughly 3,400 other players are set to join Major League Baseball's books after MLB announced Wednesday it is reclassifying the Negro Leagues as a major league.

MLB said Wednesday it was "correcting a longtime 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.

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. There was no standard method of record keeping for the Negro Leagues, but there are enough box scores to stitch together some of its statistical past.

For instance, Mays could be credited with 17 hits from his 1948 season with the Alabama Black Barons. Irvin, a teammate of Mays' with the New York Giants, could see his career average climb from .293 to .304 if numbers listed at Baseball-Reference from his nine Negro League seasons are accurate. And Paige, who currently is credited with 28 major league wins, should add at least 146 to his total.

While some have estimated Gibson slugged over 800 homers during 16 Negro League sea-

sons, it's unlikely that enough records exist for him to officially pass Barry Bonds for the career record at 762.

Depending on what Elias and MLB rule, though, Gibson could wind up with another notable record. His .441 batting average in 1943 would be the best season mark ever, edging Hugh Duffy's .440 from 1894. Gibson's line came in fewer than 80 games, however, far short of the modern standard of 162.

"We couldn't be more thrilled by this recognition of the significance of the Negro Leagues in Major League Baseball history," said Edward Schauder, legal representative for Gibson's estate and co-founder of the Negro Leagues Players Association. "Josh Gibson was a legend who

would have certainly been a top player in the major leagues if he had been allowed to play."

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 perceived deficiencies of the Negro Leagues' structure and scheduling were born of MLB's exclusionary practices, and denying them major league status has been a double penalty, much like that exacted of Hall of Fame candidates prior to Satchel Paige's induction in 1971," baseball historian John Thorn said. "Granting MLB status to the Negro Leagues a century after their founding is profoundly gratifying."