

# A Better Wisconsin: Still no plan from Wisconsin Republicans to help speed unemployment claims

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MADISON, Wis. — Wisconsin Republicans have known for the better part of a decade that the antiquated technology used by the unemployment insurance system was unable to handle surges in claims. At a hearing of the Senate Committee on Labor and Regulatory Reform today the Republicans who called the meeting failed to provide any plan for relief, again, despite a COVID-19 health pandemic-related surge in unemployment claims.

“Republicans who run the state legislature failed to help Wisconsinites get their unemployment benefits today, just as they have for the better part of the last decade,” commented A Better Wisconsin Together Deputy Director Mike Browne.

The nonpartisan Legislative Audit Bureau in 2014 found serious deficiencies in the ability of the unemployment insurance technology to handle a seasonal surge in claims. Their findings were submitted to the Republican-controlled legislature but no action was taken. [According to a report by UpNorth News:](#)

Specifically, the [audit](#) revealed that in the 2013-2014 fiscal year almost 1.7 million, or roughly 60 percent, of the calls placed to the call centers were not answered because the telephone queues were full. From late November 2013 through January 2014, when call volumes were higher, more than 80 percent of calls to the telephone line for filing initial claims were blocked, according to the audit.

The computer hardware being used dates from the 1970s and utilizes a

programming system that is so dated only limited numbers of people are able to work with it. [As reported by WKOW:](#)

Inside the system Wisconsin's Department of Workforce Development uses to process unemployment benefits is software that dates back to the 1950s; that software runs through a mainframe from the 1970s.

Yet instead of taking action to address these known issues, Republicans focused their legislative energies on making it harder and more complicated for people to apply for and receive benefits. [As detailed by the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel:](#)

GOP lawmakers have instituted [a series of benefit restrictions](#) over the last decade that have limited Evers' ability to respond to the current situation. Most recently, they approved [lame-duck laws](#) just before Evers took office that prevent him from loosening many benefit eligibility rules.

The lack of urgency from state Republicans also resulted in the loss of \$25 million in federal unemployment aid for Wisconsin.

Republican lawmakers have taken lumps in recent weeks because they [forced the state to cover \\$25 million in benefits](#) that would have been picked up by the federal government if they had acted more quickly to pass a coronavirus relief package.

Since the fallout from the COVID-19 global health pandemic has hit the state's workers, Gov. Tony Evers' administration has taken steps to try to help including extending unemployment call center hours, transferring state staff to help deal with increased volume and contracting with outside vendors.

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