

U.S. Sen. Baldwin: Introduces bicameral work share proposal to help employers and workers weather COVID-19 economic storm

Posted on Thursday, Jun 25, 2020

>> **WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, U.S. Senators Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), Jeff Merkley (D-OR), and Chris Murphy (D-CT), along with Wisconsin Representative Mark Pocan (D-WI) and a number of House members, introduced the *Rebuilding Main Street Act*, legislation to help small businesses, nonprofits, and workers weather the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and support safe reopening. The legislation expands the existing work share program to allow employers to share their payroll costs with the federal government, while receiving grant help to cover other fixed costs such as rent and needs for reopening safely like cleaning and protective equipment. After 14 straight weeks in which more than one million workers filed for unemployment benefits, the legislation would help laid off workers safely return to their jobs at reduced hours while continuing to receive a pro-rated unemployment benefit to compensate for their lost wages.

“The ongoing public health and economic crisis in America demands solutions from Washington and Congressional action. Small businesses, non-profits, and workers need support and it’s our job to provide it. Work share programs like the updated one we have in Wisconsin need to be supported so employers can avoid worker layoffs. Our *Rebuilding Main Street Act* will provide small businesses and non-profits the tools they need to keep workers on the payroll and move our economy forward,” **said Senator Baldwin.**

“We owe it to the people of this country to build solutions that keep workers paid, curb widespread layoffs and support small businesses all at the same time,” **said**

Congressman Pocan. “Work sharing programs hold the key to guiding states through recovery while protecting workers against an economic recession and a public health crisis. Workers should never live in fear of losing their next paycheck, and small businesses should have the tools they need to operate safely. The *Rebuilding Main Street Act* would do just that. We must expand work share programs nationwide, make it easier for states to implement, and provide federal support to workers and small businesses across this country.”

“COVID-19 has wreaked havoc on American workers, small businesses, and non-profits. And as our economy starts to reboot, it’s clear that many of the challenges they face aren’t immediately going away. Businesses and non-profits have to make tough decisions on payroll and mounting operating costs, while workers grapple with reduced hours and staying safe once they return. The *Rebuilding Main Street Act* provides relief that tackles these challenges head-on. It gives businesses and workers the immediate support they need for our economy to safely and successfully reopen, and we’ll be pushing for its inclusion in the upcoming relief package,” **said Senator Van Hollen.**

“Since the coronavirus hit, I’ve heard from business owners and workers in every corner of my state that our communities need more help to get through this precedent-shattering crisis,” **said Senator Merkley.** “The path to the other side for small businesses and working families isn’t lining the pockets of the wealthiest and most powerful executives of huge corporations. We need to rebuild our economy from Main Street up. This urgently needed legislation provides a blueprint for small businesses and their employees to drive our recovery.”

“COVID-19 is a health pandemic that has created an economic crisis, and small businesses have been especially hard hit. As local governments and states across the country implement plans to safely reopen, Congress must keep workers and small businesses in mind. Since the beginning, I’ve worked to come up with smart ways to keep small businesses afloat and workers on payroll, and I’m proud to join my friend Senator Van Hollen in introducing the *Rebuilding Main Street Act*, which builds upon our previous Main Street work. Our legislation provides relief to workers and small businesses as we try to come out on the other side of this pandemic,” **said Senator Murphy.**

Employers and workers across the country are reeling from the effects of the

COVID-19 pandemic's economic shutdown. While Congress worked to pass four bipartisan legislative packages, large segments of the workforce and business sectors have not benefitted from the economic relief programs. The Senators' proposal encourages and expands work sharing – an existing program supported by the *CARES Act* that still has far too much untapped potential – and provides additional support for employers and employees struggling during this time.

This legislation is supported by a broad coalition of organizations, including: AFL-CIO, Main Street Alliance, National Employment Law Project, Economic Policy Institute, National Women's Law Center, Common Defense, Center for American Progress, American Sustainable Business Council, MomsRising, Communication Workers of America, United Steelworkers, and American Federation of Teachers.

"I applaud Senators Van Hollen, Merkley, Murphy, and Baldwin for taking much-needed action to help those reeling economically from this devastating pandemic," **said AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka.** "We need to find more ways to keep workers attached to their jobs because too many working people, nonprofits and small businesses have been left behind in the previously-passed relief packages. Building on the *HEROES Act*, the *Rebuilding Main Street Act* is another important step in supporting those who are the backbone of America's economy."

"The *Rebuilding Main St. Act* solves the riddle of how to both preserve payrolls and businesses, and in so doing, it paves the way for a gradual, phased-in opening followed by a more robust recovery," **said Jared Bernstein, Senior Fellow, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.**

"The *Rebuilding Main Street Act* is a smart and flexible program that gives employers the flexibility they need to respond to the COVID-19 crisis, while keeping their workforces in place and ensuring their workers maintain their salaries and benefits. This is an approach to building resilience and creating the certainty that business owners and their employees need to pivot and sustain during these uncertain times," **said Amanda Ballantyne, Executive Director, Main Street Alliance.**

"The nation continues to face a public health crisis that has spurred an economic crisis unlike anything we've seen since the Great Depression. To help stanch the

economic bleeding, Congress must think creatively and act boldly; the risks of doing too little far outweigh the risks of doing too much. We must prioritize policies aimed at keeping workers and small businesses afloat right now. Policies like the *Rebuilding Main Street Act*, which would use the large-scale deployment of an existing but underutilized part of the Unemployment Insurance program called Short-Time Compensation or Work-Sharing alongside a new grant program for firms to cover fixed costs, would help put us on a path to a stronger economic recovery. I commend Senators Van Hollen, Merkley, and Murphy for their leadership on this issue, and I urge Congress to make ongoing relief to workers and small businesses a top priority in the next legislative package,” **said Heather Boushey, President & CEO and Co-founder of the Washington Center for Equitable Growth.**

“Many countries have shown that work sharing can be an effective tool to protect workers from unemployment in a downturn. While work sharing has been part of many states unemployment insurance systems for decades, it is seriously underutilized. The Van Hollen bill provides companies with a strong incentive to use work sharing rather than layoffs as a response to weak demand. It will also help to make employers aware of this option,” **said Dean Baker, Senior Economist and Co-founder of the Center for Economic and Policy Research and Visiting Professor at the University of Utah.**

A fact sheet on the *Rebuilding Main Street Act* is available [here](#) and bill text is available [here](#).

An online version of this release is available [here](#).