Statement of William E. Spriggs

"Supporting the Economy by Supporting Workers"

Testimony prepared for

US House of Representatives Subcommittee on Investor Protection, Entrepreneurship, and Capital Markets

116th Congress, Second Session

Hearing on

"Capital Markets and Emergency Lending in the COVID-19 Era"

July 14, 2020

Thank you, Chair Maxine Waters and Ranking Member Patrick McHenry, for this invitation to give testimony before your committee today on the issue of our nation's unemployment crisis. I am happy to offer this testimony on behalf of the AFL-CIO, America's house of labor, representing the working people of the United States; and based on my expertise as a professor in Howard University's Department of Economics.

My testimony today will discuss the immediate challenge our nation faces from the collapse of personal consumption brought on by our record levels of unemployment. Despite slight improvements in May and June from the records reported in April, we remain in the worst crisis the American labor market has faced on record.[1] We face this dilemma, because the United States chose as its labor policy in response to the need to reduce human contact in fighting the Coronavirus to lay-off workers and use the unemployment system, rather than the policy most other industrialized nations pursued, which was to retain workers in place and subsidize employers' that needed to shut down or reduce hours to be in compliance with social distancing.[2]

The Coronavirus is a highly contagious and deadly disease, and it is a global Pandemic.[3] From February 2020 through the week ending July 12, the Center for Disease Control reported

[1] (Dunn, Haugen and Kang 2018)
[2] (International Labour Organization 2020) (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development 2020)
[3] (Cucinotta and Vanelli 2020)

over 119,000 deaths in the United States involving COVID-19.[4] Given the huge numbers of Americans killed by the virus, extraordinary steps and policies are in order.

Many studies are emerging showing the huge benefits social distancing has made in containing the virus, limiting hospitalizations and deaths.[5] And in an early attempt at the beginning of March estimated a value of $8 trillion saved because of the projected lives saved through to October by practicing social distancing from March through May or June.[6] These clear benefits mean we have large latitude in implementing economic policies to mitigate their costs, and still come out ahead as a society. And, we have the room to properly account for and address the racial and gender inequalities that are becoming apparent, and that will slow the recovery is not corrected.

My testimony will focus on the aspect of unemployment insurance, as one of those economic costs. I will show that the incidence of unemployment has not fallen evenly, and so while we all benefit because our social distancing measures significantly slowed the progress of the virus, the economic costs have not been shared evenly. The unique nature of the virus and the economic costs to fight the virus has twisted the labor market in many ways. Those workers who can tele-work, or those whose work allows for safe practice of social distancing face greatly reduced risks of catching the virus; while those workers who continue to work because their jobs are deemed too vital despite the risks to them of contracting the disease because they cannot tele-work, or their jobs must be done in close proximity to others and so cannot social distance at work, or those who must encounter the public, or give aid to the ill or those who are incarcerated or assist those in long term care bear the cost of risking illness. These too have built-in racial disparities policy makers should acknowledge and address. In a situation where these economic costs have been placed by policy, and not by market action, it becomes vital for policy makers to understand the consequences of their actions and to take responsibility for any resulting inequalities.

Further, the imbalances created by these policies alter relationships in the market place. Closing businesses that employ large numbers of people, and limiting economic activity, makes

---

[4] (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National Center for Health Statistics 2020)
[5] (Matrajt and Leung 2020) (Flaxman, et al. 2020) (Hsiang, et al. 2020)
[6] (Greenstone and Nigam 2020)

clear losers, but opens many opportunities for those who are not limited. Having large numbers of workers unemployed with limited hiring prospects clearly shifts bargaining in favor of employers. And, primes the conditions to create monopsony power in most employers who are looking to hire workers.

Further, because working today exposes workers to the risk of catching COVID, in a normally functioning market, economists typically assume the labor market would compensate workers for the higher risk. The theory of compensating differential for doing riskier jobs is used to explain why coal miners or construction workers earn more than similar workers.[7] But, in this case, workers do not have a full range of job opportunities and the market is not likely with such high unemployment to give them leverage to bargain for compensating differentials.

At the same time, the economy is facing the pressures of a "normal" recession. The loss of income and therefore demand from a large set of workers, extreme pressures on state and local budgets from increased costs to contain the virus and loss of revenue from lower economic activity threaten an additional drag on the economy when those public sector budgets are slashed to come into balance, policy uncertainty and economic uncertainty on the extent of damage the virus may inflict, a collapse in global trade, and a rise in the dollar are huge weights on the economy. Even high-income households that may have suffered less loss in income face the uncertainty caused by the disease on travel, school openings and child care, freezing demand for automobiles and home purchases. Recognizing who is losing income and how that can affect drops in consumption is important. Simply re-opening restaurants and bars, will not undo those factors. And, as we have seen, so many states are now seeing their cases of the virus spiking as they have tried to "re-open," only adding to uncertainty and therefore exacerbating the problems the virus is causing the economy. Congress must keep in mind the need to keep up strong countercyclical programs to combat the "normal" recession part of the unemployment crisis.

To all these ends, Congress passed the CARES Act, March 27, that boosted the provisions of unemployment insurance. This was vital to addressing one dimension of fairness of closing down or curtailing some business activity to save the economy over $8 trillion from lost lives. That huge benefit, allowed for a big down payment to cover the costs borne by those

---

[7] (Purse 2004)

workers who would be displaced. At the time the social distancing policy was put in place, a little under 17 million American workers were employed in leisure and hospitality, the industry most affected by those policies and which includes food and drinking establishments, hotels and amusement parks. Yet, in 2018, a typical labor market, and the most recent data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, shows only 7.8 percent of unemployed workers in the Leisure and Hospitality Industry received unemployment benefits.[8] Further, the average weekly benefit for unemployment insurance in the U.S. compared to average weekly wages is a little less than 40 percent, so a typical unemployment check would leave workers far from whole.[9] So, without great modification to normal state unemployment insurance laws, the largest bulk of workers asked to bear the costs of lower earnings would not have had access to any compensation, and the few who would get benefits would have been far from whole.

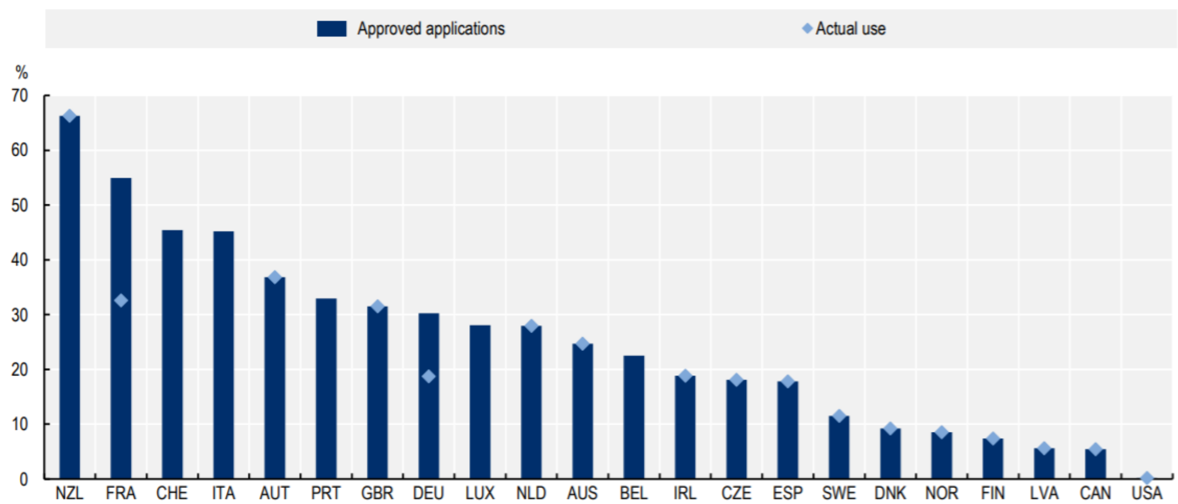
Two key modifications were made to address the shortcomings of regular state unemployment insurance systems. One was to create Pandemic Unemployment Assistance that would help workers whose work records might fall short of regular state requirements, including because of low earnings. The second was an attempt to raise the replacement value of a weekly unemployment benefit check to reach the average wage of workers. This was done crudely, by adding $600 to each beneficiary, since that would be the case for the average benefit check and the worker earning the average weekly wage. And, that "short cut" was necessary because state unemployment insurance offices use antiquated computer systems that would make calculating replacement rates different from the benefits already built into their systems very difficult and time consuming to accomplish. This means that the replacement rate will be over 100 percent for those workers earning less than average, and lower for those higher earners.

Rather than push workers into unemployment, other industrialized nations chose to subsidize the wages of workers and keep them connected to their employers. Figure 1, drawn from comparative analysis done by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), shows the stark differences between other countries and the United States in how this employment crisis was handled.[10] Of course, they benefited from greater experience using these laws and a far greater reliance on sectoral bargaining that extends collective

[8] (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2019)
[9] (U.S. Department of Labor. Employment & Training Administration 2019)
[10] (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development 2020)

bargaining standards nationally. Further, in most other countries, worker dismissals carry costs, and so unlike in the United States, policies to help with retention are received as very cost effective. New Zealand made greatest use of this type of program, covering about two-thirds of their workers, France over half their workforce were eligible, though only about a third actual were paid and Germany and Great Britain both covered about thirty percent of their workers. Through May, France, Italy and Germany remained with their unemployment rates in single digit levels.

Approved applications and actual participants in job retention schemes as a share of dependent employees



Note: Approved applications figures include workers who, ultimately, may end up working their normal hours. Data refer to end May except for Luxembourg and Switzerland (end April). United States: data refer to participation in short-time compensation schemes. Australia, Canada, Ireland, the Netherlands and New Zealand operate wage subsidy schemes, which are not conditional on the reduction in working hours. Take-up rates are calculated as a percentage of dependent employees in 2019 Q4.
Source: *OECD Employment Outlook 2020* (Chapter 1), https://doi.org/10.1787/1686c758-en.

Figure 1

- Why continuing the $600 Pandemic Unemployment Compensation is important

1. Maintaining aggregate demand

The huge drop in aggregate payroll that hit the U.S. economy in March and April was partially offset when Congress sought the highest replacement rate for this unprecedented fall. And, because the impetus came from containing the virus to order social distancing as a necessary policy choice, some policy certainty is needed by Americans about their future incomes. This is especially true as workers look at the worse labor market prospects ever recorded, despite a small recovery of some jobs in May.

Figure 2 shows the estimate from the Bureau of Economic Analysis of the loss in the personal income accounts from the drop in wages that took place in March. Ahead of Congressional action to fix problems that may have hampered workers in the leisure and hospitality industries from accessing unemployment insurance benefits, that industry lost over 700,000 jobs. Private sector wages fell in March at an annualized rate of $332.2 billion. With only regular state unemployment insurance in place, and with record millions of people applying each week for benefits, unemployment insurance only made up $43.5 billion of that loss.

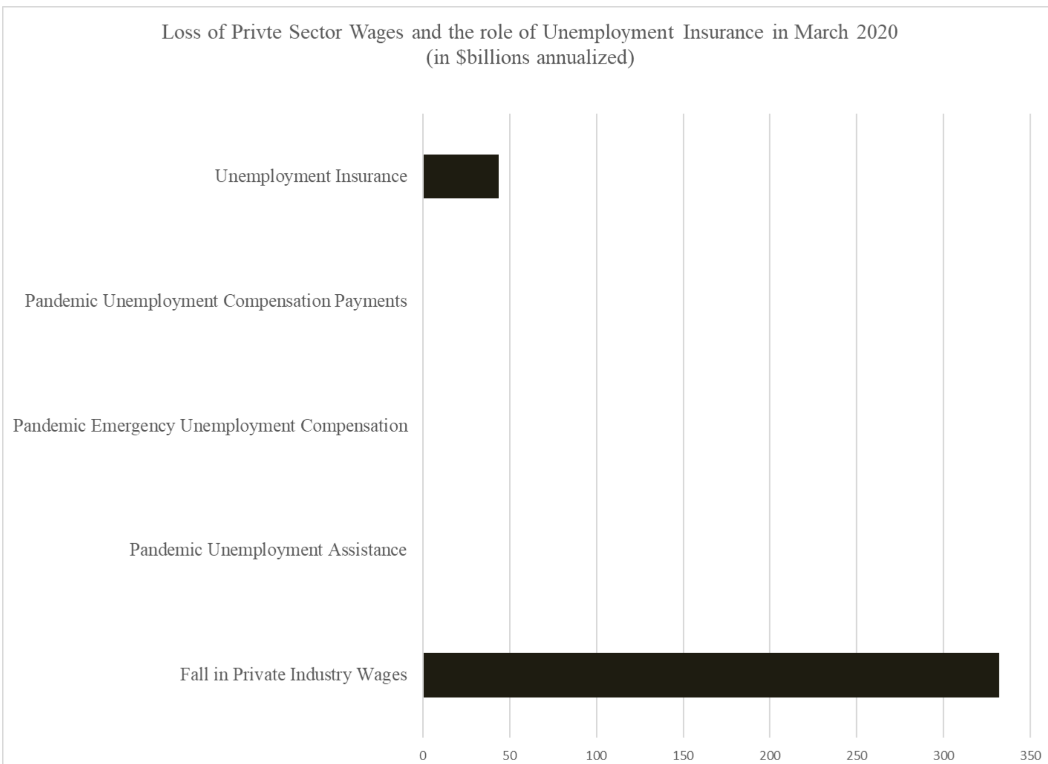


Figure 2

But, in April, with Pandemic Unemployment Assistance in place in most states, the unemployment insurance system did a far greater job of replacing lost wages, though the drop in wages was much greater than in March. Figure 3 shows the greater level of mitigation for the loss of wages, and the economy was able to stabilize. This was a much bigger impact on the part of unemployment insurance than from September 2008 to October 2009 when private sector wages fell during the Great Recession. So, this was vital to the economy. The biggest part of the Pandemic Unemployment aid came from the boost of $600 in the weekly unemployment checks of those who were able to get unemployment benefits. Because states were slow to implement the procedures for the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance and the Pandemic Emergency

Unemployment Compensation, large numbers of workers did not get access to those benefits. This means that millions of unemployed workers will not have received the full help that Congress intended. So, if the extra $600 is cut off, many will have been left out. That will make the recovery uneven, and sputter as those communities left behind will face greater challenges.

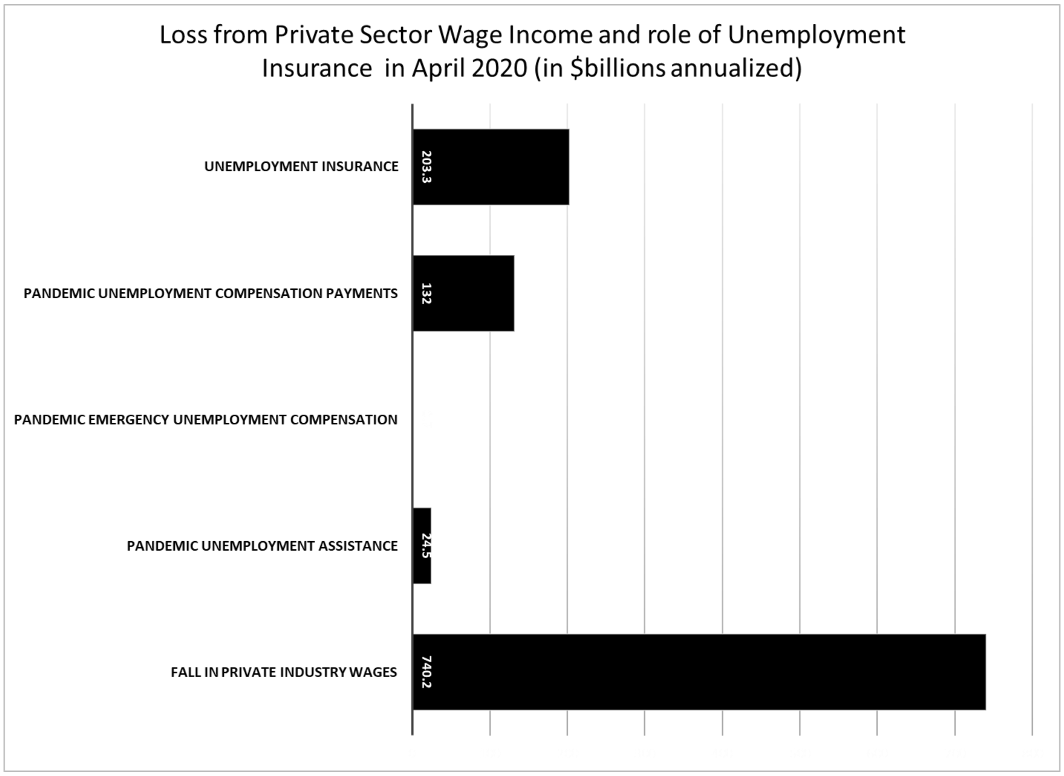


Figure 3

However imperfect the $600 Pandemic Unemployment Compensation Payment may be, it must be viewed from its role as a macro-economic stabilizer.[11] And, in the context of the greatest recorded loss of jobs in American economic history, the policy response needs to be equally as large to offset such a dramatic income loss shock.

The drop in consumption that has taken place has been dramatic across a range of industries, not just those affected by social distancing. Figure 4 shows the decline in consumption for a broad range of products.[12] Average consumption levels for the months of 2019 are shown as

[11] (U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis 2020)
[12] (U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis 2020)

100, and the lines show consumption through May 2020. Consumption in many products has fallen below 50 percent of normal 2019 consumption. Consumption of new light trucks and domestic new automobiles are off more than 30 percent. Only food bought for home consumption has kept up with 2019 levels.

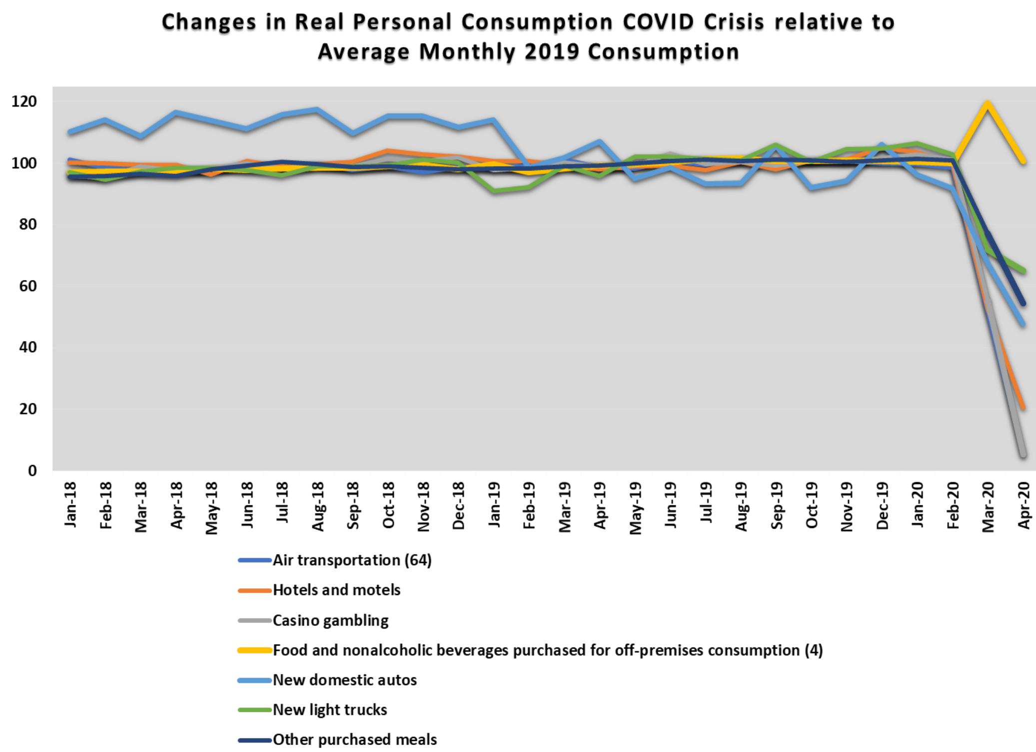


Figure 4

We do not have projections for unemployment levels through the end of the year from the Office of Management and Budget. But we do have estimates from the Congressional Budget Office that the average unemployment rate in the fourth quarter will be 10.5 percent.[13]

The pattern of lay offs is changing. In March, many workers reported their job loss as temporary. But this has now shifted toward larger shares of workers reporting their job loss as permanent separations from their employers as shown in Figure 5. The number of those on permanent layoff has now climbed to over 2.8 million.[14] That shift reflects weakness in the labor market beyond the sectors directly affected by social distancing, like the jobs lost in mining and

[13] (Congressional Budget Office 2020)
[14] (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2020)

oil, and the downturn in durable goods manufacturing, like in motor vehicles and parts. Further, it is showing in the change in unemployment duration, doubling the share of unemployed workers unemployed 5 to 14 weeks from 31.5 percent in February to 65.2 percent in June.[15]

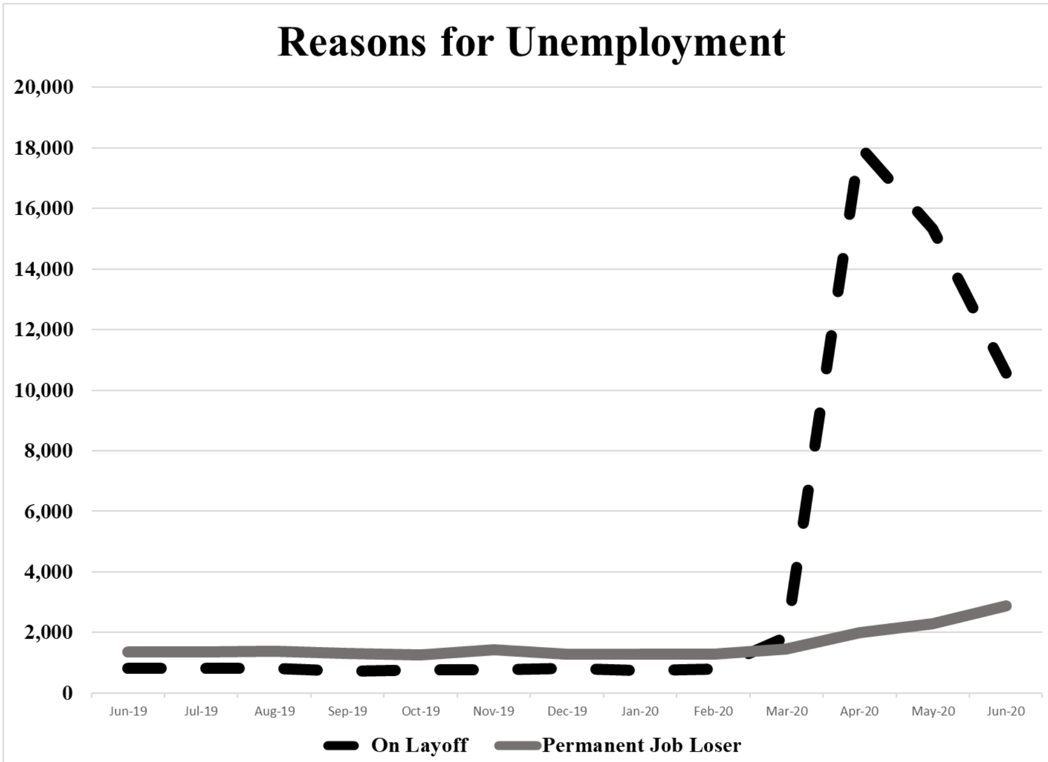


Figure 5

If workers do not receive certainty soon that the benefits will be extended, they are likely to dramatically cut back on consumption in July to try and build some liquidity against the dramatic fall in income ahead. This will shrink the economy and undo the good done by the Pandemic Unemployment relief in April.

2. Maintaining Equity

A consideration raised by several observers, is a concern about the workers earning below average wages, because they believe the replacement rate for them from receiving $600 is too high. Of course, it is an odd concern to be worried that something helps those at the bottom too much, since normal equity issues are that income inequality in the United States has exploded

[15] (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2020)

because too much of the gains in income have gone to the top. So, normally, in discussions of equity, the question is what policies can be put in place so that incomes at the bottom can rise relative to those at the top.

A more careful analysis however, would explain the additional equity concerns brought about by the unusual policy decisions that had to be made to insure the safety of the nation, which is saving the American economy $8 trillion by saving lives. A reasonable attempt to differentiate those industries directly affected by social distancing orders, is that roughly 20 percent, or one-in-five workers were in those industries most highly affected. Workers in those industries tended to be younger, under age 25, and were more likely to be young women, and a higher share were Hispanic. These industries also tended to have a higher share of part-time workers, and single-parent households. The workers at greater risk of being in the affected industries were less likely to have a college degree. They were more likely to be in the bottom 60 percent of the family income distribution, living in families making less than $75,000. For those families in the poorest 20 percent of American families, about 46 percent, almost one-in-two, of households depend on all family earned income coming from a job in one of the most affected industries. And, among those families with a little more income, in the lower-middle income fifth, a little more than one-in-four families depends on all earned income coming from a job in one of the most affected industries. So, these workers are vulnerable workers. While the unemployment rate for the overall economy is staggering, the unemployment rate in April for the workers in the most affected industries was a towering 34.1 percent, which is above the levels we believe were seen during the Great Depression. For Black, Hispanic and for women workers in these industries, their unemployment rates in April were roughly 38 percent.[16]

An analysis of job search choices by workers, and the effect of the high unemployment insurance replacement rate on accepting a job offer must also include the likelihood a worker has of landing a job. If the chances of finding a job are otherwise astronomical, the worse chances any American worker has seen, then modelling the effect of the replacement rate of insurance benefits rates has to be adjusted. Further, a refined model would have workers factor in the experience of the Great Recession, which was that if their unemployment spell lasts too long, they are very unlikely to land another job Given that these workers are younger, the prospect of

[16] (Dey, Loewenstein, et al. 2020)

waiting out the labor market and retiring is too remote. Further, as these workers are disproportionately from groups who routinely face discrimination, they are all too aware that a difficult labor market for other workers than for them it is going to be more arduous. Since June, the weekly flash surveys done by the U.S. Census Bureau have showed growing anxiety among Black, Latino and Asian Americans that they may lose their jobs in the coming month.[17]

So, a fair modelling of their situation would greatly discount the unemployment insurance replacement rate. Therefore, it was little surprise that in May, the labor force flow data revealed a dramatic reversal from the 17.5 million workers who went from employed in March to unemployed in April, to in May when 7.7 million workers went back from unemployed in April to being employed, followed by another 7.7 million unemployed workers shifting to employment from May to June.[18] Most of the small advance in employment that took place was in the most affected industries; workers with low wages. Clearly, these workers understand the dire position they are in, and choose work over being cast into the worse labor market any American has seen.

From an equity perspective, the shutdown of their industries, is far more akin to what is observed during plant closings. The economic research is clear. Workers who experience plant closures suffer permanent income loss.[19] It is unlikely that the almost 12 million workers who lost their jobs from February to April in the industries affected by social distancing policy will all find their way back to their previous employers. So large numbers of workers, who were already earning low wages, will likely suffer long scars from the choice to put them into unemployment rather than to support their wages and have them stay in place with their employer. A different way to look at their replacement rate, is to look at the loss to their permanent incomes they are likely to suffer and how much is being replaced by unemployment insurance. To build a robust recovery, it is necessary to build in that calculation because it will not be a quick return to work for these Americans.

Those who are worried about work disincentives should instead note that a disproportionate share of the workers who were negatively affected were women. And, if adequate funding does not flow to state and local governments very soon, there will be too much uncertainty around

[17] (Contractor 2020)
[18] (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2020)
[19] (Couch and Placzek 2010)

school openings. The result will be, with insufficient support, women will find it difficult to handle schools being partially closed and getting to work. The HEROES Act, which the House of Representatives has passed, is a vital and necessary step to help workers return to the labor market. And, without it, the recovery will be complicated by further layoffs that will make it harder for some of these same workers to find jobs, as school cafeteria, school bus driver, teacher aide and school crossing guard jobs remain as part of the job losses experienced in April.

3. Racial equity

While Black workers were not as likely as Hispanic workers to be in the affected industries, those Black workers in the affected industries made Black family income as negatively affected as was the case for Hispanic families. So, while income losses were reported across all income ranges, because the losses were more severe among those families with incomes below $75,000, a higher share of Black and Hispanic families suffered income drops. Figure 6 shows this disparate outcome.

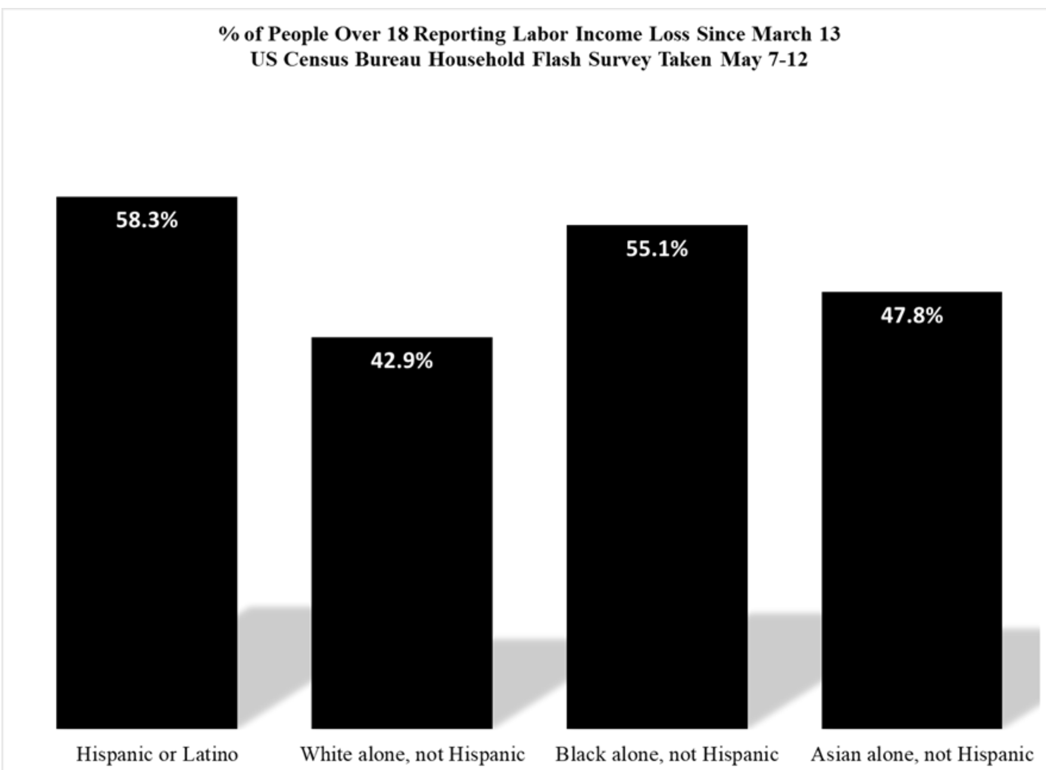


Figure 6

For Black families, the loss of income is compounded by the problem of living disproportionately in states that were the slowest to implement the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance benefits. In a normal economy, unemployed Black and Hispanic workers are less likely than White workers to receive unemployment benefits. Part of this is because of the higher share of Black workers who live in the South, and in those states with lower unemployment recipiency rates.[20] For the week ending May 23, about 35 percent of those receiving any unemployment benefits were receiving benefits because of the Pandemic Unemployment insurance programs of the CARES Act. Yet, there were still 9 states that were reporting zero PUA claims; including Arkansas, Florida, Kentucky, Georgia and West Virginia.[21] These failures among states with higher shares of Black workers, make the access to the program lower for Black families. Based on data from the Minneapolis Federal Reserve Bank's Opportunity & Inclusive Growth Institute's COVID survey,[22] Black workers show a distinct disadvantage in getting unemployment insurance benefits during this unemployment crisis. Figures 7 and 8 show this is true, despite unemployed Black workers applying at similar rates. And, the persistent issue of difficulty for women to access unemployment benefits also shows.

[20] (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2019)
[21] (U.S. Department of Labor. Employment & Training Administration 2020)
[22] Author's calculations with Nyanna Browne, using (Wozniak, Willey, et al. 2020)

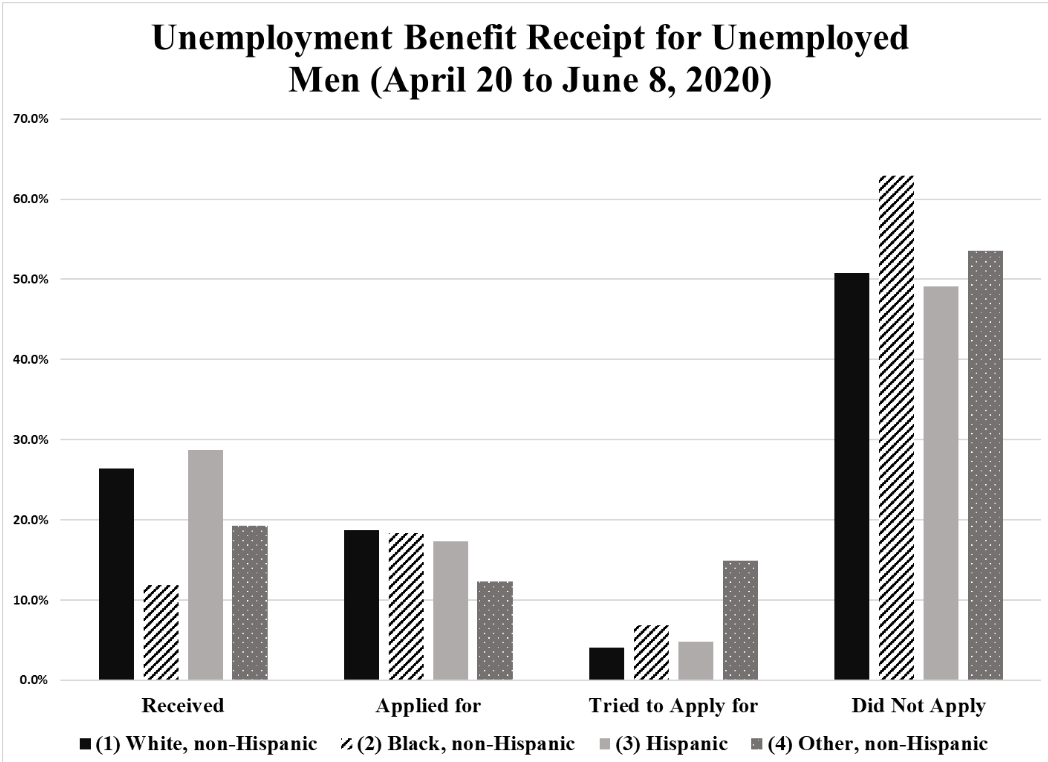


Figure 7

Similar to other research, the data show that workers' have had difficulty applying for the benefits, with a slightly higher share of difficulty for Black men, than others. This is also the case for women, shown in Figure 8. So, it is likely it will take some time for Black workers and women to get the benefits that Congress intended for unemployed workers to receive.

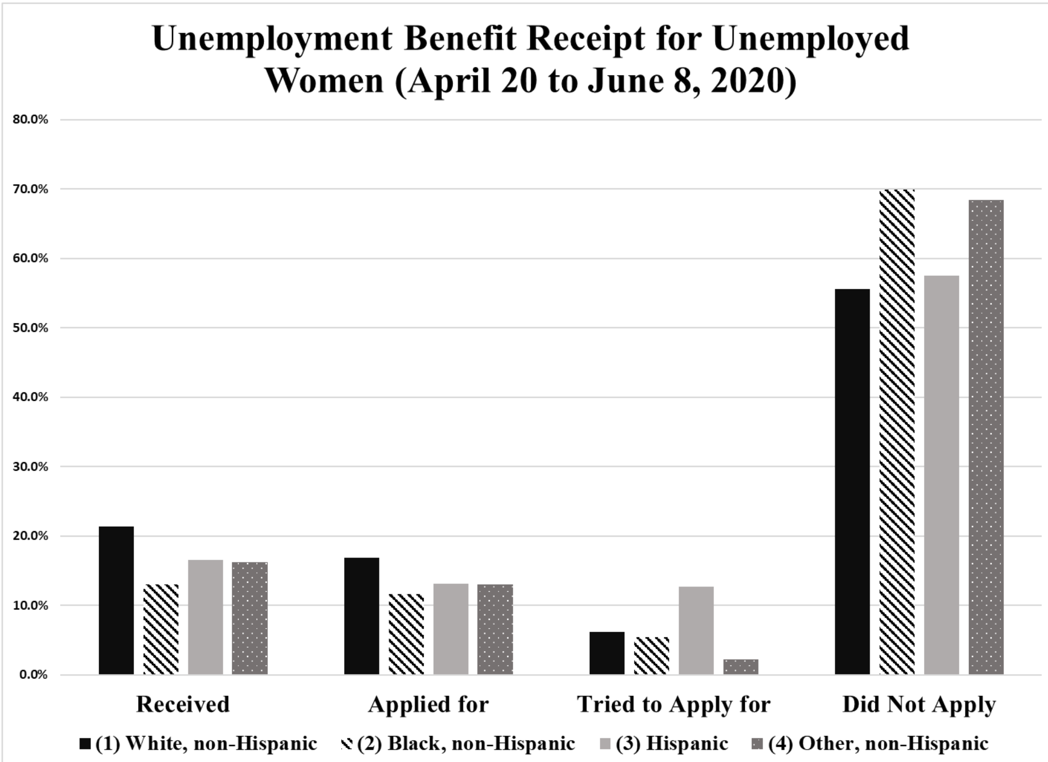


Figure 8

Withdrawing the additional $600 will end up having a disparate impact on Black and on women because by July 31, a much smaller share of unemployed Black workers and women will have received any unemployment benefits.

Black and Hispanic workers combine to be about 30 percent of the American workforce. Their plight from the loss of income is compounded because of their low levels of wealth and specifically their low levels of liquid wealth (assets that can easily and quickly be turned into cash). A study of Black and Hispanic households has found that a drop in income from the loss of a job leads to a 50 percent larger drop in consumption for Black households, and a 20 percent larger drop in consumption for Hispanic households for each dollar of income lost compared to White households.[23] Because of the lack of liquidity for this large segment of the workforce, job losses get magnified in the economy through larger reductions in consumption. So, disparate job losses in these communities have outsized outcomes on the macro-economy because they are now 30 percent of American workers.

[23] (Ganong, et al. 2020)

Figure 9 is taken from a study using large data sets based on credit card expenditures, and shows the decline in expenditures in March for both high- and low-income families.[24] But, clearly, as the unemployment benefits begin to take effect over the month of April, low income families return to their previous level of consumption. This reflects that lower income household spending is already near a lower limit to cover basic household needs. Higher income households are still spending at lower rates because of uncertainty from the coronavirus effects on the society and planning.

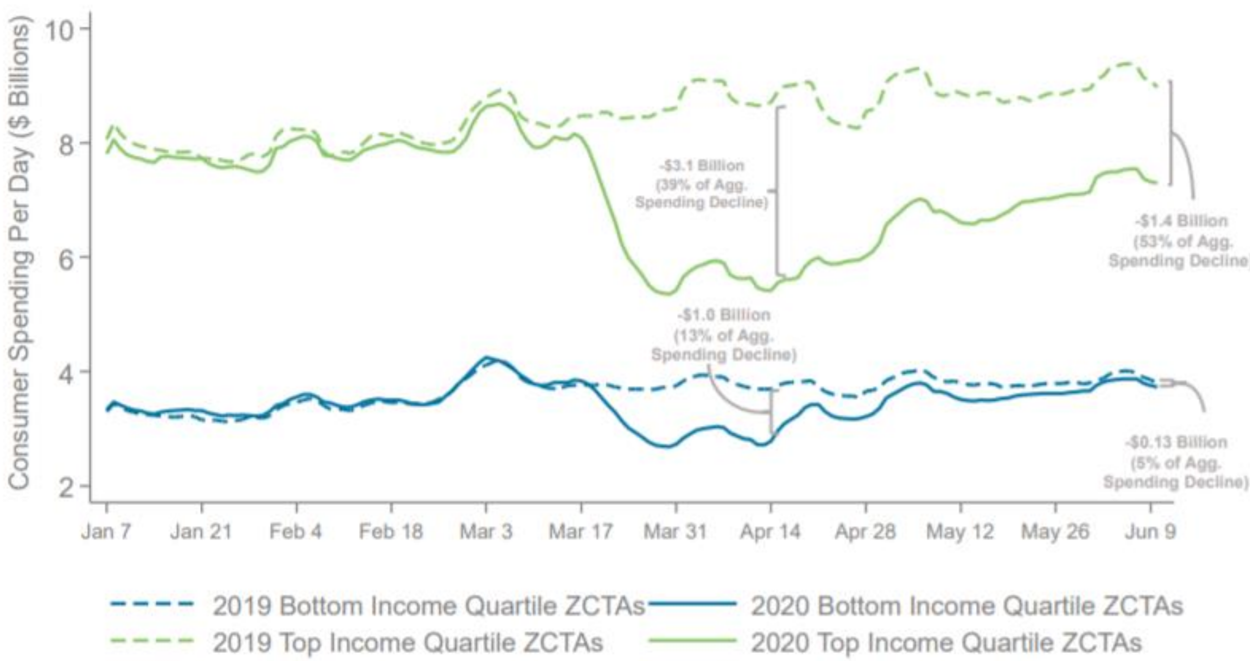


Figure 9

Further, as Black and Hispanic families face greater housing vulnerability, losses of incomes can add stress on rental markets as arrears in rents can mount. Unemployment insurance, and the generosity of the benefits do help alleviate pressures on foreclosures.[25] Data from the National Multifamily Housing Council shows that in April, the number of renters paying rent on time dipped to 78.0 percent, below last April's 82.9 percent. Following the unemployment assistance, on time rent payments bounced back so June's 80.9 percent on time payments were more similar

[24] (Chetty, et al. 2020)
[25] (Hsu, Matsa and Melzer 2018)

to last June's 81.6 percent rate. But, with uncertainty over the unemployment benefits looming, July on time rental payments dipped to a low of 77.4 percent.[26] A clear sign household are trying to marshal their resources as best they can, fearing a drop in income to come in August. And, for these two communities hit hard by foreclosures during the Great Recession this is important. We have no room for mounting bad debts in the banking sector, given issues of corporate and business debt already growing on the banks' books. Keeping the household sector as liquid as possible is the best way to avoid compounding what is, so far, a crisis in the real economy.

4. Exacerbating Labor Market Power Imbalances

There are two key issues at risk in thinking of the $600 Pandemic Unemployment Compensation as a work deterrent beyond issues of equity. First, and primary, is a misguided belief that simply re-opening businesses will solve the current unemployment crisis. This is wrong because while about 12 million of the jobs lost from February to April likely trace to the closing businesses to achieve social distancing, that leaves more than 8 million jobs in other industries lost because our economy is super fragile because of its high level of inequality. As a result, aggregate demand collapses quickly. Some because of the wealth inequality, that makes the loss of jobs in the Black and Hispanic communities get magnified when they lose jobs. And, some because workers' wages have not been keeping up with productivity, and that gap always means that when the economy slows and workers cannot borrow, they cannot consume at a pace to keep aggregate demand high. The other 8 million jobs are roughly the size of the job loss from the Great Recession.

Simply re-opening restaurants and bars will not solve the underlying issue, which is finding an effective set of policies to contain and stop the virus from killing. Without an effective strategy to fight the virus, increasing the number of workers who cannot shelter in place puts them, and their families at risk. This is not trivial.

For Black and Hispanic households, COVID is a disease of working age people. It is the result of the over-representation of Black and Hispanic workers among those who cannot tele-work and who are over represented in front line jobs exposed to the virus. There is scant

[26] (National Multifamily Housing Council 2020)

evidence that shows disparities in pre-existing health conditions explains higher morbidity among Blacks in the United States.

The Center for Disease Control did a study of a convenience sample (choosing the first set of patients, rather than select them randomly) of 305 patients in 7 hospitals in metropolitan Atlanta and one community hospital in southern Georgi of patients over 18 with laboratory-confirmed cases of COVID-19, between March 1 and March 30 of this year. They found 83.2 percent of the patients were Black, though Black patients in the hospitals studied made up only 47 percent of all patients. And, they did find that 73.8 percent of the COVID positive cases did have conditions that are considered high risk for COVID patients. But, very importantly, they did not find significant differences between Black patients and others in incidences of diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular disease, or chronic lung diseases. Most importantly, the Black patients were not more likely to end up on invasive mechanical ventilation or to die. Blacks were over represented among the dead, because they were over represented among the COVID patients.[27]

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention also looked at health care professionals to understand the incidence of COVID among them. Looking at data from February 12 to April 9 of this year, for data where they could identify health care occupations and race of the patient, they found 21 percent of the cases were of Black health care professionals. That number is out of proportion to the Black presence in the general work force, but among health care workers, Blacks are close to 20 per cent.[28] So, Black health care workers are not more likely to catch the disease than non-Black health professionals, but the over representation of Blacks in this front line occupation means a higher share of all Black workers would show up with the disease.

Black workers are over-represented in a number of front-line occupations, including childcare and social services, health care, building and cleaning services, trucking, warehouse and postal services, public transit and grocery, convenience and drug stores. They work as essential workers, and in jobs that do not allow for tele-work. Hispanics are over represented among child care and social service workers, building and cleaning services, health care services and in grocery, convenience and drug stores.[29] Both are over represented among meat packing

---

[27] (Gold, et al. 2020)
[28] (Team 2020)
[29] (Rho, Brown and Fremstad 2020)

and animal slaughter.[30] Black and Hispanic workers are much less likely to have jobs where they can tele-work, and this disparity coupled with the occupations where they are over represented means a higher share are not sheltering in place and face exposure to the disease.[31]

The result is that when you look at the age distribution of hospitalizations for COVID-positive patients, the majority of Black and Hispanic patients are working age, while for whites, the majority (almost 65 percent) are over 65. Almost 47 percent of Hispanic patients are 18 to 49, and 55 percent of Black patients are 18 to 64. Figure 10 shows the age distributions by age and race.

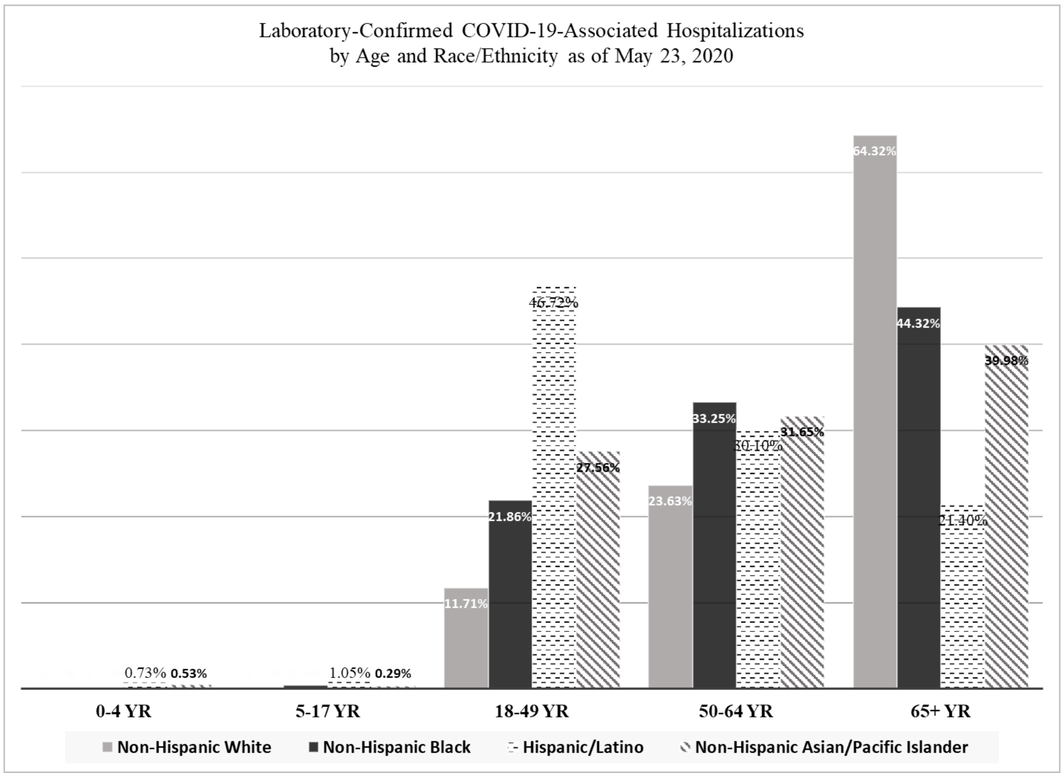


Figure 10

It is essential to understand the risk workers face, as stories continue to mount of problems in meat packing and elder care facilities. Returning to work to face risks, means workers should expect to receive some compensating differential for the risk. But that assumes the workers have the bargaining power and choices to freely choose to accept the risk. Efforts by state governments to force unemployed workers to take job offers tips the scale radically in favor

[30] (Fremstad, Rho and Brown 2020)
[31] (Gould and Shierholz 2020) (Dey, Frazis, et al. 2020)

of companies that do not want to pay for the risks and wish merely to take advantage of high unemployment levels and the state government siding with the employer on how much bargaining power workers should have in this situation. Research has noted that workers constrained by discrimination in their job offers, are not able to command the same risk premia as other workers, Black males and immigrant workers exhibit lower risk premia in some studies.[32] A recent survey done by the National Employment Law Project found high levels of retaliation and fears of retaliation from workers who felt unsafe at work. Their national survey reported 73 percent of Black workers went to work, though "they believed they were seriously risking their health;" compared with 49 percent of white workers. They found that roughly one in seven Black workers did not report their concerns to their employer out of fear of facing retaliation.[33]

Workers already feel vulnerable in this labor market. Recent work shows a disturbing pattern of low wage workers, especially women, who report to work despite self-reporting a fever and other potential symptoms of the virus. This suggests workers are taking on great risks, just to stay employed.[34]

The other imbalance is in a job market with low levels of job hiring, firms that are hiring are likely to wield monopsony power, as among only a few firms hiring. Lowering the bargaining power of workers, already low because of the record level unemployment rate could lead to scarring in the labor market. If expanding firms are monopsonies, the recovery will see slower than needed wage growth coming out of this downturn. A weakness of the labor market up to February had been sluggish wage growth despite low levels of unemployment. Increasingly, economists were concerned that monopsony power was growing among employers.[35]

• Conclusions

Our economy faces two unemployment crises. One is because of our policy option to handle the necessary policy of social distancing through laying off workers and using our

[32] (Viscusi 2003) (Hall and Greenman 2015)
[33] (Tung and Padin 2020)
[34] (Wozniak, Disparities and Mitigation Behavior during COVID-19 2020)
[35] (Azar, et al. 2019) (Mendez and Sepulveda 2019)

unemployment insurance system to handle idle workers, rather than to use wage subsidies to let them be idle while maintaining their relationship with their employer. This placed inordinate costs on those workers. And, policy uncertainty, along with delays that let the incomes collapse of these millions of low wage workers, also set in motion an aggregate demand collapse that was exacerbated by limits both from social distancing and an ennui that built from the policy uncertainty on the containment of the virus.

This means we will face record levels of unemployment for some time. It is necessary we use the huge $8 trillion in savings accumulated through saving lives by using social distancing to provide the economic underpinnings to gain the confidence of Americans on the virus fighting front. If it becomes necessary to re-institute social distancing to regain control of the virus, we must have the confidence of the American people that this will not cause a repeat of the economic pain they have already endured. We should not be fooled into thinking that simply re-opening restaurants and bars will answer the challenges of a collapse in global markets, shrinking export market opportunities and a strong dollar, global over capacity in autos, and coming crisis with state and local government finance that all point to huge headwinds for the Fall.

The House of Representatives already acted swiftly to pass the HEROES Act. But, it needs to pass the Senate, too. Well before July comes, workers need to know how they will handle their bills in August. And, we will not be able to get labor force participation up without funding to state and local governments in hand to settle issues of school openings for the Fall. Waiting until July will damage an already fragile economy. Maintaining sufficient aggregate demand must be a priority for a healthy recovery.

Worker safety must be a higher priority. Workers will not send their families off to shop if workers do not feel safe at work. There is no choice of "stop the virus," or grow the economy, this is time we must be concentrating on safety so the uncertainty can fall and people feel they can plan.

Workers must have confidence, that having been asked to walk away from their jobs, there is a solid plan for a just transition for them, including income support to land safely. People are counting on Congress to not repeat previous crises, when large sums of money were given to save the economies, but racial and gender equity concerns were ignored. And, people are counting on Congress that there will not be a repeat of bail outs for the rich that go unquestioned, and unaccounted for, and griping being reserved for workers who are struggling.

While the benefits to health of social distancing are clear, Congress should still be concerned about the cost effectiveness of measures it takes. Transparency in the programs is very important. The key objectives must be to control the virus, and keep aggregate demand as stable as possible so the household sector can gain the confidence to resume spending. In this regard, Congress should do all it can to ensure that companies receiving support are spending that support to keep payrolls up and workers safe on the job. Congress wants to make sure the money is going to support the "real economy" where goods and services are produced, and not the financial sector. That means avoiding funds going to prop up financial activities, since these will not support the immediate needs of the economy. Firms spending funds on stock buy backs or extravagant corporate executive bonuses or dividends, diverts funds needed to insure safe workplaces. Those activities will not boost the economy. Further firms need to be encouraged to boost pay of their front-line workers, who now face great risks, and to insure there are paid sick days and leave to empower workers to stay home if they are sick. Companies that do not ensure that workers do not spread the virus at work are hurting themselves, when their operations are disrupted when workers become ill; but, also risking the safety of the community at large in continuing the spread of the virus away from the workplace when their workers go home to their families. It would be harmful for Congress to ignore firms that want to act irresponsibly.

None of this will happen by wishing this would all go away. We must plan to get out of this.

Works Cited

Azar, Jose, Emiliano Huet-Vaughn, Ioana Marinescu, Bledi Taska, and Till von Wachter. 2019. *Minimum Wage Employment Effects and Labor Market Concentration.* Working Paper, Cambridge: National Bureau of Economic Research.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National Center for Health Statistics. 2020. *COVID-19 Death Data and Resources: Daily Updates of Totals by Week and State.* July 10. Accessed July 12, 2020. https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/covid19/index.htm.

Chetty, Raj, John N. Friedman, Nathaniel Hendren, and Michael Stepner. 2020. *How Did COVID-19 and Stabilization Policies Affect Spending and Employment? A New Real-Time Economic Tracker*

Based on Private Sector Data. Working Paper, Cambridge: Opportunity Insights. https://opportunityinsights.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/tracker_paper.pdf.

Congressional Budget Office. 2020. *An Update to the Economic Outlook: 2020 to 2030.* Washington: Congressional Budget Office. https://www.cbo.gov/system/files/2020-07/56442-CBO-update-economic-outlook.pdf.

Contractor, Harin. 2020. *Tracking the Economic Shock from COVID-19.* News & Insights, Washington: Nexight Group. https://www.nexightgroup.com/tracking-the-economic-shock-from-covid-19/.

Couch, Kenneth A., and Dana W. Placzek. 2010. ""Earnings Losses of Displaced Workers Revisited"." *American Economic Review* 100 (1): 572-589.

Cucinotta, D, and M. Vanelli. 2020. "WHO Declares COVID-19 a Pandemic." *Acta Biomed* 91 (1): 157-160. https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32191675/.

Dey, Matthew, Harley Frazis, Mark A. Loewenstein, and Hugette Sun. 2020. "Ability to work from home: evidence from two surveys and implications for the labor market in the COVID-19 pandemic." *Monthly Labor Review*, June. https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2020/article/ability-to-work-from-home.htm.

Dey, Matthew, Mark A. Loewenstein, David S. Piccone Jr., and Anne E. Polivka. 2020. ""Demographics, earnings, and family charactersitics of workers in sectors initially affected by COVID-19 shutdowns"." *Monthly Labor Review* (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics). https://doi.org/10.21916/mlr.2020.11.

Dunn, Megan, Steven E. Haugen, and Janie-Lynn Kang. 2018. "The Current Population Survey--tracking unemployment in the United States for over 75 years." *Monthly Labor Review* (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics). https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2018/article/the-current-population-survey-tracking-unemployment.htm.

Flaxman, Seth, Swapnil Mishra, Axel Gandy, H. Juliette T. Unwin, Thomas, A. Mellan, and et.al. 2020. "Estimating the effects of non-pharmaceutical interventions on COVID-19 in Europe." *Nature* Accelerated Article Preview. https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/eid/article/26/8/20-1093_article.

Fremstad, Shawn, Hye Jin Rho, and Hayley Brown. 2020. *Meatpacking Workers are a Diverse Group Who Need Better Protections.* Washington: Center for Economic and Policy Research. https://cepr.net/meatpacking-workers-are-a-diverse-group-who-need-better-protections/.

Ganong, Peter, Damon Jones, Pascal Noel, Diana Farrell, Fiona Greig, and Chris Wheat. 2020. *Wealth, Race, and Consumption Smoothing of Typical Income Shocks.* Working Paper, Chicago: Becker Friedman Institute for Economics at University of Chicago. https://bfi.uchicago.edu/wp-content/uploads/BFI_WP_202049.pdf.

Gold, JA, KK Wong, CM Szablewski, and et.al. 2020. "Characteristics and Clinical Outcomes of Adult Patients Hospitalized with COVID-19 — Georgia." *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) 69: 545-550. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6918e1.

Gould, Elise, and Heidi Shierholz. 2020. *Not everybody can work from home: Black and Hispanic workers are much less likely to be able to telework.* Washington: Economic Policy Institute. https://www.epi.org/blog/black-and-hispanic-workers-are-much-less-likely-to-be-able-to-work-from-home/.

Greenstone, Michael, and Vishan Nigam. 2020. *Does Social Distancing Matter.* BFI Working Paper, Chicago: Becker Friedman Institute at the University of Chicago. https://bfi.uchicago.edu/working-paper/2020-26/.

Hall, Matthew, and Emily Greenman. 2015. "The occupational cost of being illegal in the United States: Legal status, job hazards, and compensating differentials." *International Migration Review* 49 (2): 406-442. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1111/imre.12090.

Hsiang, Solomon, Daniel Allen, Sebastien Annan-Phan, Kendon Bell, Ian Bolliger, Trinetta Chong, and et.al. 2020. "The effect of large-scale anti-contagion policies on the COVID-19 pandemic." *Nature* Accelerated Article Preview. https://www.nature.com/articles/s41586-020-2404-8.epdf?sharing_token=-4c0eJD5MJyvzx6bigOsoNRgN0jAjWel9jnR3ZoTv0M3uHJG_l5lsYP3xOR5eqb7CPPkXGbKYCqSpFTBLPL7jIX0_buyUI_SsKhtJ2DwR0aQRWXiCMCYZ1F4Amu6Xq1k2iyAA7oVJiXjR_-ZbmgcVUhvpuFt_wT7pGrj54g38QQ%3D.

Hsu, Joanne W., David A. Matsa, and Brian T. Melzer. 2018. ""Unemployment Insurance as a Housing Market Stabilizer"." *American Economic Review* 108 (1): 49-81.

International Labour Organization. 2020. *COVID-19 and the world of work. Updated estimated and analysis.* ILO Monitor, Geneva: International Labour Organization. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms_743146.pdf.

Matrajt, L, and T. Leung. 2020. "Evaluating the effectiveness of social distancing interventions to delay or flatten the epidemic curve of coronavirus disease." *Emerging Infectious Diseases* 26 (Early Release): Pre-publication. https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/eid/article/26/8/20-1093_article.

Mendez, Fabio, and Facundo Sepulveda. 2019. "Monopsony Power in Occupational Labor Markets." *Journal of Labor Research* 40: 387-411.

National Multifamily Housing Council. 2020. *NMHC Rent Payment Tracker.* July 8. Accessed July 13, 2020. https://www.nmhc.org/research-insight/nmhc-rent-payment-tracker/.

Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. 2020. Vol. 2020, in *OECD Economic Outlook*, by Issue Note 5: Flattening the unemployment curve? Policies to support workers' income and promote a speedy labour market recovery. Paris: OECD. https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/0d1d1e2e-en/1/3/2/5/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/0d1d1e2e-en&_csp_=bfaa0426ac4b641531f10226ccc9a886&itemIGO=oecd&itemContentType=.

Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. 2020. *OECD Employment Outlook 2020: Worker Security and the COVID19 Crisis.* Paris: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/employment/oecd-employment-outlook-2020_1686c758-en.

Purse, Kevin. 2004. "Work-related fatality risks and neoclassical compensating wage differentials." *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 28 (4): 597-614. doi: https://doi.org/10.1093/cje/28.4.597.

Rho, Hye Jin, Hayley Brown, and Shawn Fremstad. 2020. *A Basic Demographic Profile of Workers in Frontline Industries.* Washington: Center for Economic and Policy Research. https://cepr.net/a-basic-demographic-profile-of-workers-in-frontline-industries/.

Swagel, Phillip L. 2020. "Letter to Honorable Charles Grassley." *Re: Economic Effects of Additional Unemployment Benefits of $600 per.* Washington: U.S. Congress. Congressional Budget Office, June 4. https://www.cbo.gov/system/files/2020-06/56387-CBO-Grassley-Letter.pdf.

Team, CDC COVID-19 Response. 2020. "Characteristics of Health Care Personnel with COVID-19 — United States, February 12–April 9, 2020." *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) 69 (15): 477-481. https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6915e6.htm?s_cid=mm6915e6_w#suggestedcitation.

Tung, Irene, and Laura Padin. 2020. *Silenced About COVID-19 in the Workplace.* Data Brief, Washington: National Employment Law Project. https://www.nelp.org/publication/silenced-covid-19-workplace/.

U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis. 2020. *Effects of Selected Federal Pandemic Response Programs on Personal Income.* Washington: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis. https://www.bea.gov/sites/default/files/2020-05/Effects-of-Pandemic-Legislation-on-Personal-Income.pdf.

—. 2020. *Table 2.4.6U.* June 25. Accessed July 13, 2020. https://apps.bea.gov/iTable/iTable.cfm?reqid=19&step=2#reqid=19&step=2&isuri=1&1921=underlying.

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. 2019. *CHARACTERISTICS OF UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE APPLICANTS AND BENEFIT.* Washington: U.S. Department of Labor. Bureau of Labor Statistics. https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/uisup.pdf.

—. 2020. *Labor force status flows by sex recent months.* July 2. Accessed July 12, 2020. https://www.bls.gov/web/empsit/cps_flows_recent.htm.

—. 2020. *Table A-11.* July 2. Accessed July 13, 2020. https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.t11.htm.

—. 2020. *Table A-12.* July 2. Accessed July 13, 2020. https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.t12.htm.

U.S. Department of Labor. Employment & Training Administration. 2019. *UI Replacement Rates.* November 1. Accessed June 16, 2020. https://oui.doleta.gov/unemploy/repl_ratio/repl_ratio_rpt.asp.

U.S. Department of Labor. Employment & Training Administration. 2020. *Unemployment Insurance Weekly Claims.* Washington: U.S. Department of Labor. https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/OPA/newsreleases/ui-claims/20201216.pdf.

Viscusi, W. Kip. 2003. "Racial Differences in Labor Market Values of a Statistical Life." *Journal of Risk and Uncertainty* 27: 239-256. doi:10.1023/A:1025893226730.

Wozniak, Abigail. 2020. *Disparities and Mitigation Behavior during COVID-19.* Institute Working Paper, Minneapolis: Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis. Opportunity & Inclusive Growth Institute. https://www.minneapolisfed.org/institute/working-papers-institute/iwp32.pdf.

Wozniak, Abigail, Joe Willey, Jennifer Benz, and Nick Har. 2020. *COVID Impact Survey.* Verson 1 [dataset], Chicago: National Opinion Research Center. https://www.covid-impact.org/results.