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## Mnuchin Urges Congress to Pass More Stimulus Funding

Treasury secretary says he would call Speaker Pelosi to press for more talks on coronavirus-relief bill



Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin testified Tuesday before the House Select Subcommittee on the coronavirus crisis.

PHOTO: NICHOLAS KAMM/PRESS POOL

By Paul Kiernan

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WASHINGTON—Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin urged Congress to appropriate more money to combat the effects of the [coronavirus pandemic](#), saying at a hearing Tuesday that he was ready to sit down with Democratic leaders to resume negotiations at any time.

For more than a month since key provisions of the landmark Cares Act expired, Democrats and Republicans [have been at loggerheads](#) over the size and content of another relief package. House Democrats in May proposed an additional \$3.5 trillion of relief, while Senate Republicans rolled out a \$1 trillion bill in July. Without a new agreement, jobless workers have gone without a \$600 federal supplement to weekly unemployment insurance since July 31, and [a federal eviction moratorium](#) expired on July 25, leaving millions of tenants at risk of losing their homes.

The Trump administration is moving to halt evictions through the end of the year in an effort to slow the spread of Covid-19, senior administration officials said Tuesday, adding that it was relying on the authority of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to take measures deemed necessary to mitigate the spread of communicable diseases.

In Tuesday's hearing before a congressional panel, Mr. Mnuchin suggested the gap between the two sides may be narrowing and mentioned a new, higher number for the administration's proposed ceiling for a follow-on bill: \$1.5 trillion. The secretary also indicated that the Trump administration has softened its opposition to a Democratic proposal to apportion more money for state and local governments.

"Whether it's one trillion or one-and-a-half trillion, again, let's not get caught on a number," Mr. Mnuchin said. He added that Democrats and Republicans agree that more money is needed for grants for small businesses, enhanced unemployment insurance and direct payments to households.

Mr. Mnuchin said he and White House chief of staff Mark Meadows "conceded...in an effort to get a deal done" to put more money on the table for cities and states.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said last week Democrats [wouldn't be willing to accept](#) anything less than a \$2.2 trillion package. Asked by Rep. Maxine Waters (D., Calif.) whether he would support a deal of that size, Mr. Mnuchin said, "I do not support \$2.2 trillion."

The last known discussion between the sides—a 25-minute phone call between Mrs. Pelosi and Mr. Meadows last week—didn't loosen the stalemate. In response to prodding by Ms. Waters, Mr. Mnuchin said he would call Mrs. Pelosi after Tuesday's hearing.

Mrs. Pelosi later said in a statement that a 36-minute phone call followed, during which she raised a series of concerns that Democrats have about the Trump administration's positions on the next coronavirus relief package. She also blamed Republicans for being unwilling to compromise to reach a deal.

"Sadly this phone call made clear that Democrats and the White House continue to have serious differences understanding the gravity of the situation that America's working families are facing," Mrs. Pelosi said.

As the monthslong impasse has worn on, the White House has sought to use executive power to soften the blow to families and workers from expiring protections.

Under the antieviction measures laid out by the White House officials Tuesday, tenants are eligible for relief from eviction for not paying their rent if they earn less than \$99,000 a year, or \$198,000 for a couple filing jointly. Tenants must show they have taken all possible steps to seek government assistance and declare that Covid-19-related financial hardships are the reason they aren't able to pay rent. They must also declare that they would become homeless or would be forced to move into congregate housing facilities if evicted.

"President Trump is committed to helping hardworking Americans stay in their homes and combating the spread of the coronavirus," White House spokesman Brian Morgenstern said in a statement.

Tenants will still be asked to pay as much rent as they can afford. A senior administration official said the move is "not an invitation to stop paying rent." The rent a tenant owes won't be forgiven.

Enforcement of the CDC order will be adjudicated at the local level, another senior administration official said.

Housing advocates criticized the administration's approach, saying the process is confusing and could be difficult for tenants to navigate. They reiterated calls for Congress and the White House to work out a deal on rental assistance.

"We could still have millions of evictions in January, in the middle of winter, and all we will have accomplished is evicting people in colder weather," said David Dworkin, president and CEO of the National Housing Conference, a nonprofit group that advocates for affordable housing.

Without "a critically needed compromise" on rental assistance, he added, building owners will also miss out on rental payments for five more months.

Mr. Mnuchin said during Tuesday's hearing that he would prefer offering rental assistance to an eviction moratorium. But he said the amount of aid would need to factor in enhanced unemployment insurance.

Mr. Mnuchin also released a new estimate that the so-called Main Street Lending Program, created by the Treasury Department and Federal Reserve, will make between \$25 billion and \$50 billion of loans to midsize businesses in coming months. The program, plagued by a slow start and what many lenders and borrowers say are unattractive terms, has the capacity to lend up to \$600 billion.

—*Rebecca Ballhaus and Andrew Ackerman contributed to this article.*

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