



A bold voice for transportation workers

RESTORING RAIL WORKER SICKNESS & UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

For more than a decade, railroad workers' hard-earned Railroad Unemployment and Sickness Insurance program benefits have been subject to indiscriminate and reckless cuts made by Congress in the 2013 budget sequestration. Railroaders are the only workers in the entire country whose unemployment insurance program is subject to these cuts. The unemployment insurance program often provides the only long-term sickness benefit that most rail workers get when they miss work for an extended period of time. As freight rail workers have spent the last three years negotiating with their employers over short-term sick leave, stagnant wages, and other important benefits, there is no excuse for the federal government to continue to arbitrarily suppress lifeline unemployment and sickness benefits. It's long past time for Congress to act.

We implore Congress to pass the Railroad Employee Equity and Fairness Act, [S.545/H.R.2900](#), to permanently restore these benefits by exempting the Railroad Unemployment Insurance program from budget sequestration.

Let us be clear: no taxpayer funds or government subsidies support the program. Yet Congress has seen fit to dock the weekly stipends of railroaders and their families for more than a decade.

In 2011, Congress set in motion a swath of irresponsible and indiscriminate budget cuts, a process known as sequestration. Since then, the Railroad Unemployment and Sickness Insurance program has been unjustly impacted, leaving railroad workers to bear the consequences of Congress's dysfunction, despite the fact that the railroad industry independently funds the program through payroll taxes and employer surcharges.

As essential workers, railroaders have risked their health and wellbeing during the Covid-19 pandemic. Passenger rail workers endured long shifts dealing with unruly passengers. Freight rail workers often left their families behind while working [unpredictable schedules](#) that interrupt family and medical obligations, for nearly three years without a new contract, while delivering an unprecedented amount of essential goods to American households and businesses. Now, they are on the brink of losing a critical lifeline: the full value of the unemployment and sickness benefits that they have earned.

These working families were granted temporary relief when Congress passed pandemic relief legislation to suspend the sequestration of these benefits. **Without intervention, sequestration is scheduled to resume 30 days after President Biden declares an end to the Covid-19 national emergency and will remain in effect until 2030.**

During a time when freight rail companies have intentionally undermined their own workforce, opportunistic corporate profiteering has hit grocery stores and gas pumps, and our country is still grappling with the Covid-19 aftershock and uncertainty about future variants and the impacts they may have, it simply does not serve us to unfairly withhold needed funds from workers who

have earned them, or to further discourage job-seekers from investing themselves in a railroading career. It is Congress's responsibility to enact this long overdue and common-sense reform, and it is imperative that Congress acts quickly.

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