



REMARKS BY SECRETARY EUGENE SCALIA
G20 LABOR AND EMPLOYMENT MINISTERS EXTRAORDINARY
VIRTUAL MEETING ON COVID-19
APRIL 23, 2020

As Prepared For Delivery



Let me express my appreciation to the G20 Presidency of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for bringing us together to issue this statement of cooperation and common purpose. The fight against coronavirus touches every nation, and our statement reflects our shared responses to the pandemic.

The coronavirus hit U.S. workers hard. Weeks ago, we enjoyed an exceptional economy: Unemployment was at a 50-year-low. Wages were rising, particularly for low-wage workers.

But now, just in the last 5 weeks, more than 26 million Americans have filed for unemployment, including the 4.4 million unemployment filings my Department announced this morning.

Our government has responded to this swiftly and in a largely bi-partisan way, with President Trump and Congress enacting three major laws in three weeks in March.

Our response has included, first, direct cash payments of \$1200 to individual taxpayers, plus \$500 for each dependent child.

Second, we are incentivizing companies to keep workers on payroll. Many of your nations have done similarly. We are providing loans to small businesses to cover expenses like rent, utilities, and payroll—the loans are largely forgivable if the business keeps workers on payroll. More than \$1.5 million in loans have been approved so far.

We are also providing paid leave to workers who are ill. Our federal government has not previously required private sector employers to offer paid leave. But it has been critical to ensure that workers with the virus not hesitate to step away from the workplace. Most of our large employers already provide paid leave; our program is aimed at small businesses, and reimburses those businesses for providing leave.

Unemployment insurance has of course been an important component of our response. President Trump and Congress have provided a significant boost to unemployment compensation: \$600 a week, on top of what's provided by our States. We've also expanded unemployment benefits to self-employed workers and so-called "gig" workers, like Uber drivers.

With guidance provided last week by President Trump, our States are now preparing to re-open for business. We know that an important component of that will be assuring workers that they are safe. Our Department has been providing regular guidance and resources to employers on how to prevent exposure to coronavirus in the workplace. As needed, we will also use the authorities we have to protect workers' rights to a safe workplace.

Finally, as we look forward, following this period of exceptional and essential government intervention, we will bear in mind the policies underlying the robust economy we so recently enjoyed. Those policies recognized that fostering a vibrant business sector was the single best thing we can do for our workers, and recognized that avoiding unnecessary burdens on businesspeople was vital to job opportunity and rising wages. As we learn, during the current crisis, how government can effectively intervene, we must remember too the limitations of government, and the virtues of free markets and free people.

Thank you all for sharing your experiences and thoughts today.