



Written by [James Murphy](#) on November 30, 2022

House Passes Legislation to Halt Potential Railway Strike; Faces Hurdles in Senate

On Wednesday, the U.S. House of Representatives acted quickly on President Joe Biden's request that Congress intervene to stop a potentially crippling railway strike in the coming days. In September, Biden had previously boasted that a White House session with negotiators for the railroads and the unions had averted a potential strike.

"These rail workers will get better pay, improved working conditions, and peace of mind around their health care costs: all hard-earned. The agreement is also a victory for railway companies who will be able to retain and recruit more workers for an industry that will continue to be part of the backbone of the American economy for decades to come," the president gloated at the time.

But it seems as though the president put the cart before the horse, as the unions voted down the proposal on November 22, setting the stage for a possible work stoppage. On Monday, the president urged Congress to act quickly on legislation that would halt any potential work stoppage.

"I am calling on Congress to pass legislation immediately to adopt the Tentative Agreement between railroad workers and operators - without any modifications or delay - to avert a potentially crippling national rail shutdown," the president said in a [statement](#).

The House voted 290 to 137 to pass the legislation enacting the agreement that Biden claimed was already a done deal. In a separate vote, the House voted 221 to 207 to give rail workers a full seven days of additional paid sick leave — that portion of the House plan may face problems in the deadlocked Senate.

"We know much more needs to be done for railroad workers," outgoing House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said prior to the votes. "No one should be at risk of losing his or her job by staying home when sick, needing to see a doctor or getting life saving surgery."

The president urged the Senate to act quickly to avert a potentially disastrous strike, which many experts claim could cost the U.S. economy at least \$2 billion per day.

"Without the certainty of a final vote to avoid a shutdown this week, railroads will begin to halt the movement of critical materials like chemicals to clean our drinking water as soon as this weekend," Biden said.

But on the Senate side, there are doubts as to whether they can get the House legislation passed, given



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they'll need to get at least ten Republican votes to overcome a possible filibuster. And some of that opposition is coming from the left side of the aisle.

"If the rail industry can afford to spend \$25.5 billion this year to buy back its own stock and hand out huge dividends to its wealthy shareholders, please do not tell me it cannot afford to guarantee paid sick days to its workers and provide them with a decent quality of life," said Senator Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.).

The railroads and the U.S. Chamber of Congress were strictly against the additional sick pay and said that Congress should stop adding to a deal that was, supposedly, already done. That deal, that the president claimed was done, was supported by the railroads and 8 of the 12 unions involved in the negotiations.

"The proposal to add extra paid sick days was rejected by the independent emergency board and by the administration," [tweeted](#) Neil Bradley, an executive vice president of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. "Why? Because the unions had negotiated for other benefits that a majority clearly prioritize higher, [including](#) a 24% increase in pay, \$5,000 in lump sum bonuses, and comprehensive long-term paid sickness benefits that, depending on the role, can begin in as little as four days and last for up to 52 weeks."

Prior to the midterms, Biden had checked off the railway dilemma on his list of accomplishments. Now, he must depend on a lame duck Congress to deliver on an achievement that he and his administration promised us was already a done deal.

Is it any wonder that few people believe a word that comes out of President Biden's mouth?



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