The Daily Dish

Executive Orders (Again)

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Eakinomics: Executive Orders (Again)

Saturday, the president issued executive orders (EOs) and memoranda to implement policies toward payroll taxes, evictions, unemployment assistance, and student loans. These are of dubious substance, but are intended to highlight the failure of the Congress to reach a deal on legislation to address the fallout of the COVID-19 recession.

The most prominent of the EOs provides a $400 per week federal unemployment insurance benefit, sort of. Looking closer, one finds that this is a "lost wages" benefit, not an unemployment benefit. Moreover, it is provided from disaster relief funds administered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). On top of that, the federal government will provide only $300 and is counting on the states to provide the remaining $100. In the words of the EO, "In exercising this authority, the Secretary, acting through the FEMA Administrator, shall, subject to the limitations above, approve a lost wages assistance program that authorizes the Governor to provide a $400 payment per week, which shall reflect a $300 Federal contribution, to eligible claimants from the week of unemployment ending August 1, 2020."

It is a Hail Mary policy pass, at best. But it is hardly surprising or novel. As documented by Dan Goldbeck, President Trump is on track to take executive actions at a pace comparable to President Obama, and is issuing executive orders at an even faster pace. From the perspective of recent history, this is shocking. As Goldbeck notes, "In 2014, Republicans roundly criticized President Obama's famous assertion of using his "pen and phone" in the face of congressional intransigence, but President Trump has hardly been reticent in issuing such orders himself – particularly on immigration issues."

The paper sums up the situation perfectly: "Despite President Trump's deregulatory focus and conservatives' traditional skepticism toward unfettered executive authority, administrative data suggest that the president is currently on pace to exert this direct authority more than any of his three most immediate predecessors." This is one of the reasons that there is no longer a distinctive conservative economic policy brand.