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## **West Virginia’s only Billionaire Sees Net Worth Jump \$14 Million in First Three Months of COVID-19 Pandemic**

*Meanwhile Local Government Services Face Deep Cuts as Congress Stalls on New COVID-19 Financial Aid Package*

WASHINGTON—West Virginia’s only billionaire, Jim Justice, saw his wealth increase by \$14 million or 1.2% during the first three months of the COVID-19 pandemic, even as the state’s economy was reeling from a huge spike in joblessness and a collapse in taxes collected. This according to a new report by Americans for Tax Fairness (ATF), Health Care for America Now (HCAN) and WV Citizen Action Group shows.

This is based on an analysis of Forbes’ annual billionaires report published March 18, 2020, and the most recent real-time data collected on June 17 from the Forbes website.

As Jim Justice saw his wealth grow by 1.2%, over about the same period of the pandemic 162,000 of the state’s residents [lost their jobs](#), 2,300 [fell ill with the virus](#) and 88 died from it.

Name	March 18 Net Worth (Millions)	June 17 Real Time Worth (Millions)	Wealth Growth in 3 Months	% Growth in 3 Months	Primary Income Source	Industry
Jim Justice, II.	\$1,200	\$1,214	\$14	1.2%	coal	Metals & Mining

Sources: All data is from Forbes and [available here](#).  
 March 18, 2020, data is from the [Forbes World’s Billionaires List: The Richest in 2020](#).  
 June 17, 2020 data was taken from Forbes real-time estimates of worth that day.

Recent data reported by WV Center on Budget & Policy in an [Gazette/Mail op-ed](#) indicated that Covid created budget holes may be filled by funds reserved for Medicaid coverage at a time when folks are losing jobs and healthcare and the utilization will be dramatically increasing.

Among other COVID-19 victims are the [27 million Americans who may lose their employer-provided healthcare coverage](#). [Low-wage workers](#), [people of color](#) and [women](#) have suffered

disproportionately in the combined medical and economic crises because of long-standing racial and gender disparities. Billionaires are overwhelmingly white men.

Over the same three-month period, the nation's 600-plus billionaires saw their combined wealth [increase by \\$584 billion or 20%](#)—rising from \$2.948 trillion to \$3.531 trillion, based on ATF's analysis of Forbes data. Meanwhile, the Federal Reserve reported that as of the week of June 10, [total U.S. household wealth had shrunk by \\$6.5 trillion](#) during the first three months of the pandemic.

The three richest Americans, Jeff Bezos, Bill Gates and Mark Zuckerberg, saw their combined wealth jump by \$87 billion, or 38%, 11% and 58%, respectively. The total number of billionaires grew from 614 to 643.

“Our Governor, who is West Virginia's only Billionaire, is sitting on over a billion dollars in Covid response/recovery money from the federal government but doesn't appear willing to use any of it for helping the state's citizen's make it through this crisis,” Commented Gary Zuckett, Executive Director of WV Citizen Action. “On top of that he seems to be willing to spend money set aside for providing Medicaid medical coverage for our citizens on filling holes in the state budget instead of dipping into our Rainy Day fund or cancelling tax breaks for big business.”

“It's immoral that billionaires are getting richer and richer while average Americans are treading water if they are lucky, or drowning, from the economic crash caused by the pandemic,” said **Frank Clemente, executive director of Americans for Tax Fairness**. “Congress needs to urgently provide a major new financial aid package to ensure working families can recover and critical state and local services can keep being provided. The package should repeal the huge tax break for millionaires in the first major financial aid law and block any new tax cuts for corporations and the wealthy.”

“In the biggest public health crisis of our lifetimes, billionaires are getting richer while millions are losing coverage or have no access to affordable health care,” said **Margarida Jorge, executive director of Health Care for America Now**. Rather than pass the relief measures that we all need to beat COVID, Congress is letting families, workers, seniors and many others go without the health care they need to survive, letting health care workers go without protective equipment and forcing hospitals to face unprecedented shortages in beds, ventilators and medicines. It's obvious there's plenty of money—the problem here is Congress' priorities.”

Decades of [tax cuts for the rich](#) have fueled the growth of billionaires and their wealth. And even in the midst of the greatest national emergency since World War II, tax handouts to the wealthy have continued—most recently in the form of a [\\$135 billion handout](#) slipped into the \$2 trillion CARES pandemic relief law enacted in late March. It primarily benefits millionaire business owners and [costs three times more](#) than the law spends on social safety net programs and exceeds the amount expended on hospitals and public health.

The House HEROES Act passed in May would repeal this tax break that is giving an [average tax cut of \\$1.6 million this year](#) to 43,000 millionaires and billionaires, according to the Joint Committee on Taxation (JCT). That big payout contrasts sharply with the [one-time stimulus checks of up to \\$1,200](#) that have helped 159 million people under the CARES Act. Closing this tax loophole and making it permanent [would raise \\$246 billion](#) per the JCT, which could be used for a new major pandemic financial relief and recovery package.

As the U.S. Senate begins consideration of the next coronavirus aid legislation, a broad coalition of more than 230 organizations, including West Virginia groups, is urging [repeal of the Millionaires Giveaway tax cut for wealthy business owners](#). So far, 24 senators support legislation (S. 3640) to repeal this giveaway but not Senators Joe Manchin (D) and Shelley Moore Capito (R).

Rather than respond to growing needs from increasing numbers of unemployed people, new patients, and overburdened local and state agencies, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has been [slow-walking legislative action](#) on another major relief measure such as the HEROES Act, especially one that would provide a major cash infusion to state and local governments that have lost huge amounts of tax revenue but must by law balance their budgets. Instead, McConnell has suggested that states file for [bankruptcy](#).

The HEROES Act would greatly benefit West Virginia during this economic crisis by providing immediate relief and laying the groundwork for a more robust economic recovery, including:

- \$4.0 billion out of a total of about \$500 billion in [direct aid to state governments](#) over the next two years for critical services.
- \$1.7 billion out of a total of \$375 billion in [direct aid to local governments](#) over the next two years for critical services. [Go here](#) to see how much is going to communities in your state.
- \$800 million out of a total of [\\$117 billion in increased federal Medicaid funding](#) over the next two years.
- \$500 million out of a total of [\\$90 billion for public schools](#) for grades K-12 and public colleges and universities.

[All of the above data is available in one table here.](#)

State residents will also get their fair share of the [following other assistance](#) provided by the HEROES Act should it become law:

- Extension through the end of the year of the \$600 per week in enhanced unemployment benefits that are expiring at the end of July.
- Renewal and increase in direct assistance checks to individuals and families: \$1,200 per each adult and child, up to \$6,000 per household.
- \$100 billion to protect renters and homeowners from evictions and foreclosures.

Increased support from the federal government directly to states through these provisions is the best way to avoid state cuts to jobs and services that would worsen the impact of the pandemic and prolong the recession the country is experiencing.

[Economists warn](#) that delayed action on more funding to states, unemployment benefits, and safety net services will have dire consequences for recovery, could lengthen and deepen the recession and curtail job growth for the [next decade](#). Moreover, coronavirus cases are back on [the rise in over a dozen states](#) where the re-opening process has increased risk of exposure, furthering jeopardizing the economy. West Virginia, although having less infections than many states, has begun to see increased community spread of the Covid-19 virus as we reopen. In the last two weeks [positive Covid cases have risen 28%](#).

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell [has cited rising deficits](#) in delaying immediate consideration of new pandemic relief legislation, but so far has not proposed rolling back the \$135 billion Millionaires Giveaway in the CARES Act. Rather, McConnell's key priority for the next relief package has been to provide [legal immunity](#) to employers by limiting workers' rights in court to sue bosses who put their safety at risk or neglect COVID protocols.

Polling shows that [half of Americans](#) have been personally economically impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic -- losing their job or having their hours cut back. Congress must provide help by working with local and state elected officials and agencies to ensure workers, families and small businesses get the resources they need to make it through the pandemic and mitigate the harmful consequences of the economic slow-down.

State residents can't afford excuses from Congressional leaders who prioritize tax giveaways for the rich and corporations over the basic needs of average people or more delays that will double down on prolonged pain for millions.