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The Challenge of Getting Restaurant Workers to Come Back, Nation's Restaurant News

By Arif Virji, managing partner of KD San Francisco and Sonoma offices.

Fear of COVID-19 and the pull of enhanced unemployment benefits is keeping employees off the job, but that may not be enough to turn down work.

As restaurants gradually reopen for greater levels of dine-in service, employers are faced with the challenge of convincing their workers to come back.

Through the end of July, many of those workers were sustained by an extra $600 per week in additional emergency support created under the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security, or CARES, Act, a relief effort Democrats in Congress would like to see continued. Senate Republicans are reportedly considering a bill that would provide $300 per week in enhanced benefits.

In the meantime, President Trump has issued an executive order granting a $400 weekly benefit and a number of states, including California, have negotiated accepting a modified version of that executive order, pending a final resolution of the standoff in Congress. As a result, most employees will be guaranteed at least some level of significant additional unemployment benefits through the end of the year.

Restaurants that are reopening will therefore continue to confront the problem of employees who may prefer to remain on those enhanced unemployment benefits — especially in states where COVID-19 cases are spiking.

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