

EDITORS' PICK | 93,516 views | Apr 27, 2020, 08:00am EDT

Billionaires Are Getting Richer During The COVID-19 Pandemic While Most Americans Suffer



Jack Kelly Senior Contributor ⓘ

Careers

I write actionable interview, career and salary advice.



GETTY

Billionaires are not in the same boat with the rest of us, as we try to navigate the treacherous currents of the COVID-19 pandemic. They're

smoothly sailing in luxury yachts, while most Americans are doing the doggy paddle, treading water and just trying to stay afloat.

According to the Institute for Policy Studies, [billionaire wealth has boomed](#), while over [26 million people have filed for unemployment](#) since mid-March. The percentage of taxes paid by billionaires has fallen 79% since 1980. From the start of March to now, the group of billionaires' total wealth has increased by \$308 billion. Billionaires boast a combined net worth of \$3.229 trillion and their collective wealth skyrocketed up 1,130% between 1990 and 2020.

As of April 15, Amazon founder and CEO Jeff Bezos' already incredible wealth soared an additional \$25 billion during the pandemic—after being down for a bit during the early days of the outbreak and the stock market's initial free fall. Eric Yuan, the founder and CEO of Zoom, the now ubiquitous online video conferencing technology company, realized a rapid rise in his wealth throughout the outbreak and is reported to be worth about \$2.58 billion.

Recommended For You

[3 New Scientific Studies Say, 'Mask Up!' COVID-19 Can Spread In Surprising Ways We Didn't Realize](#)

[Report: More Than 800 Deaths And 5,800 Hospitalizations Globally May Have Resulted From COVID-19 Misinformation Online](#)

[Unstoppable Self Confidence: Never Ask Yourself These Two Questions](#)

[Billionaires](#), including Bezos, his ex-wife MacKenzie Bezos, Eric Yuan, former Microsoft chief Steve Ballmer and Elon Musk, each saw their fortunes jump by more than \$1 billion dollars. Bezos, Bill Gates and

Warren Buffett have as much money as the bottom half of all American households. This is juxtaposed with roughly 78% of people in the United States living paycheck to paycheck, 20% with no or negative net worth and lack three months worth of emergency funds.

In addition to the billionaires, the rich are getting richer too. The multi-trillion dollar stimulus plan included financial help to small business owners in the form of the Paycheck Protection Program. The program was corrupted by large companies taking a lion share of the proceeds.

The banks that processed the \$349 billion loan program made out very well, booking over \$10 billion in fees, [according to NPR](#). The banks charged up to 5% in fees, although there was little or no risk to them, as the loans are guaranteed by the Small Business Administration.

While Americans are scraping over buying toilet paper and necessities, homeschooling their children, caring for sick family members or just trying to make it through the day, the uber-wealthy have taken to their [yachts and private jets](#).

David Geffen, a music and film icon, who is worth \$7.7 billion according to *Forbes*, exemplified the disconnect between the ultra rich and everyone else by literally sailing away. Geffen, on his now-deleted Instagram account, wrote, “Isolated in the Grenadines avoiding the virus. I’m hoping everybody is staying safe.”

Some suspect that billionaires must engage in unethical practices to have attained that much wealth and believe it is morally wrong for anyone to possess that much money. Many claim that their wealth should be redistributed. There's another school of thought that billionaires, such as Bezos, should be closely scrutinized. There have been calls for Congress to set up a "[Pandemic Profiteering Oversight Committee](#)"—similar to the one established by then U.S. Senator (before he became president) Harry Truman. He created the "Senate Special Committee to Investigate the National Defense Program," which was established during World War II to investigate corruption and profiteering.

Bezos is a tremendous business person and possibly one of the greatest entrepreneurs in modern history. However, when almost all physical retail stores (Amazon's competitors) are ordered to close and people are told to stay at home and the *Washington Post* (owned by Bezos) reports dire daily warnings about the virus outbreak and how Americans should

continue the lockdown, regulators should—at the very least—take a look at what’s happening.

The same is true of other companies, such as Apple, Google and Microsoft, that are starting to resemble near-monopolies. Their raw power, warchests of money and political clout make them almost invincible. Though, we have a history of breaking up companies, like AT&T, that have acquired too much power and control.

In our capitalist system—which has [ironically turned socialist](#) in response to the COVID-19 outbreak and its impact on the economy—becoming a billionaire is fine. Most of them have worked hard and built companies that offer innovative, useful and important products and services. Instead of attacking the persons, we should look at whether or not the billionaires run companies that are anti-competitive, ruthlessly thwarting rivals and stopping new startups from thriving. These are bigger problems for America compared to someone who just has an awful lot of money.



You may opt out any time. [Terms and Conditions](#) and [Privacy Policy](#).

Follow me on [Twitter](#) or [LinkedIn](#). Check out my [website](#) or some of my other work [here](#).



Jack Kelly

Follow

I am a CEO, founder, and executive recruiter at one of the oldest and largest global search firms in my area of expertise, and have personally placed thousands of... **Read More**

Print

Reprints & Permissions

ADVERTISEMENT
