Statement on Congress's Renewal of Unemployment Insurance

Statement by Christine L. Owens, Executive Director, National Employment Law Project:

America’s unemployed workers have reason to celebrate Congress’s bi-partisan approval of the fiscal cliff compromise that extends the federal Emergency Unemployment Compensation (EUC) program through 2013. The deal preserves a vital lifeline of support for two million long-term unemployed workers who faced an abrupt cut-off of all jobless aid this week, and for millions more who will run out of state unemployment insurance during 2013. Congress rightly treated the extension of unemployment insurance as an emergency measure, not requiring its cost to be offset.

Renewal of the EUC program through 2013 keeps in place the strongest program of unemployment insurance in the nation’s history, an appropriate response to the Great Recession and slow recovery that continue to generate too few jobs for all who want and need to work. Building and maintaining this program would not have been possible without strong leadership in the Senate and House, especially by Senator Jack Reed and Representative Sander Levin, and the unwavering commitment of President Obama since day one of his presidency. We commend the President and congressional leaders for their dedication to preserving this crucial program. Moreover, thousands of unemployed Americans fought to maintain the program—even when it no longer served them—as an essential safeguard against poverty and a gateway to re-employment for the jobless. Through their voices and personal stories, they helped ensure that the unemployed would not be forgotten or left behind at year’s end.

With unemployment insurance preserved through 2013, Congress and the President must now work together on meaningful job-creation measures. Despite modest growth over the last two years, the nation still faces a deep deficit of about nine million jobs. Creating more good jobs is one of the greatest challenges we face and is the most important step our nation’s leaders can take to help unemployed workers.

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