



National Employment Law Project

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Media Inquiries Only Contact: Tim Bradley, 646-200-5308

MAY EMPLOYMENT REPORT: NATIONAL EMPLOYMENT LAW PROJECT STATEMENT

Andrew Stettner, Deputy Director, National Employment Law Project

Washington, D.C.— With the nation losing 345,000 jobs last month—the lowest one-month job loss since October 2008—the pace of the recession finally seems to be slowing. But, with the unemployment rate climbing above 9% (9.4% in May) for the first time since September 1983, it should be abundantly clear that the job market is in a hole that could take years to climb out of. With 14.5 million Americans remaining unemployed and thousands likely to exhaust unemployment benefits this summer and fall, today's report underscores anew the need for Congress and the states to administer strong relief to the still-ailing economy and jobless workers who are still struggling to stay afloat.

“Today’s new employment figures show that while the recent tide of job losses may have marginally subsided, there are still 14.5 million Americans without jobs, and the safety net of jobless benefits is in the spotlight. An impressive number of states have started to make use of the recovery package provisions to extend and expand unemployment benefits, acting to provide a vital lifeline to workers as they face a stubbornly slow job market. Jobless Americans are eagerly looking for help, and jobless benefits are still one of the fastest means for boosting both workers and the economy,” said Andrew Stettner, Deputy Director of the National Employment Law Project (NELP).

“It is critical that eligible, high-unemployment states take advantage of federal support by swiftly administering Extended Benefits funded by the President’s American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. But, given the staggering depth of the jobs slump, further action is required beyond the stimulus bill—like the Obama administration’s new directive to increase job training and education among the jobless and continued improvements and expansions to the unemployment program.”

Today’s numbers reveal a bleak picture of unemployment today. As measured, the “unofficial” unemployment rate of 16.4% means that more than 1 of out 6 adult Americans who want to work can’t find a job or only can find part-time work. An unprecedented 3.9 million Americans have been unemployed for six months or more—families who are straining to meet their basic needs and still cannot find work even after months of searching. With the nation having lost jobs for a record 17 months (tying a mark set in December 1982), policy makers at the federal and state level still face a herculean task in supporting jobless families and helping them return to good jobs in this economy.

“Long-term unemployment remains at a record high, with the economy still producing only one job for every five job-seekers,” Stettner added. “Congress and the Administration will almost inevitably need to revisit the temporary federal emergency unemployment compensation program later this year.”