



National Employment Law Project

For Immediate Release: March 5, 2010

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FEBRUARY JOB LOSSES KEEP LONG TERM UNEMPLOYMENT SKY HIGH

NELP Urges Congress to Pass UI Extension Through 2010 to Prevent More Benefit Lapses for Long-Term Unemployed

Washington, DC – The February employment report released today by the Department of Labor revealed that 36,000 jobs were lost last month and that long-term unemployment remained at sharply elevated levels. 6.1 million workers, or 40.9% of the unemployed, have been without a job for more than 26 weeks and the average duration of unemployment is now 29.7 weeks. This unrelenting crisis of long-term unemployment underscores, once again, the need to enact a full extension of federal jobless benefits programs through the end of 2010.

“Today’s jobs report demonstrates the high stakes of the political tug-of-war over unemployment benefits that broke out last week. With over 14.8 million Americans out of work, we need to resume a long-term strategy for fighting long-term unemployment. Congress must extend benefits through the end of 2010. While the 30-day measure approved this week was a necessary stopgap, workers will be struggling with long-term joblessness long after those 30 days are up.” said Christine Owens, Executive Director of the National Employment Law Project.

There are currently 11.4 million workers collecting some form of unemployment benefits. State jobless benefits provide up to 26 weeks of unemployment insurance, after which workers can apply for up to an additional 73 weeks through four tiers of federal jobless benefits under the Emergency Unemployment Compensation (EUC) and Extended Benefits (EB) programs. Under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act passed in February 2009, the federal assistance also includes an extra \$25/week in benefits and a 65% COBRA subsidy for health care.

An extension of the existing federal programs through the end of 2010 would allow workers who have exhausted state benefits to participate in the federal program, and it would allow workers already receiving federal benefits to move to further tiers once they exhaust their current one.

The 30-day extension of benefits approved by the Senate on Tuesday will extend the deadline to apply for unemployment insurance to April 5 and maintain the COBRA subsidy through the end of March. On Monday, Senators Reid and Baucus introduced the American Workers State and Business Relief Act, which would extend unemployment benefits and COBRA programs until December 31st, at a price of \$70 billion over 10 years.

“This week we saw what happens when Congress allows jobless benefits to lapse – however briefly: federal legislators spend precious time debating extensions that should be already in place; large state agencies are forced to turn on a dime and reprogram their systems to administer unemployment checks; and hundreds of thousands of workers are left to wonder and worry about how they are going to pay their bills,” said Owens.

“This type of constant brinksmanship with the well-being of workers, their families and communities is unnecessary and counterproductive – workers simply cannot afford to go through this benefits renewal drama every month or two. Now that it has taken care of the immediate crisis, Congress should extend benefits through 2010 once and for all – so jobless workers will have a reliable lifeline of support, communities can count on stable spending, and Congress can get on with other important steps to create jobs and get the economy back on track,” concluded Owens.

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