

From the National Employment Law Project, Center for American Progress Action Fund & The Half in Ten Campaign

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## **NEW POLL FINDS HUGE SUPPORT TO CONTINUE UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE PROGRAMS, AS NOV 30<sup>th</sup> DEADLINE NEARS**

*Rejecting Deficit Arguments, Three in Four Americans Say Too Soon to Cut Support  
to the Unemployed*

### **Large Majority Backs Programs Until Jobless Rate Significantly Drops**

Washington, DC – Americans overwhelmingly believe Congress should continue providing federal unemployment insurance to workers who have exhausted their state benefits and are still unemployed, a [new poll](#) by Hart Research Associates finds, and they firmly reject the idea that deficit concerns should lead to cuts in support for the jobless when the unemployment rate remains so high.

The post-election survey, in which nearly three in four Americans say it is too early to cut jobless benefits, comes just days before the November 30<sup>th</sup> deadline to renew the federal unemployment insurance programs – when two million workers will be cut off next month alone if Congress does not act.

“There is deep public support for continuing the federal unemployment programs at a time when unemployment is at 9.6% and millions are still out of work,” said **Christine Owens, Executive Director of the National Employment Law Project**. “Support for continuing these programs trumps concerns about the deficit – which should be no surprise when nearly half of all unemployed workers have been looking for work for more than six months but have not been able to find jobs. Now, if Congress fails to renew the benefits that expire November 30<sup>th</sup>, two million workers will be cut off in December alone. For the sake of the economy and millions of struggling families, Congress should continue these programs for a full year,” said Owens.

The poll specifically finds that when asked which statement they agree with more, 73% of voters agree that “With unemployment at nine point six percent and millions still out of work, it is too early to start cutting back benefits for workers who lost their jobs,” while only 24% of voters agree that “With the federal deficit over one trillion dollars, it is time for the government to start cutting back on unemployment benefits for the unemployed.” Additionally, two-thirds (67%) believe the programs should continue until there is a significant drop in the jobless rate.

“Americans understand how hard it is out there, with only one job opening for every five unemployed workers. That’s why people not only want to see jobless benefits continue – they want them to

continue until the jobless rate significantly improves. Indeed, Congress has never cut benefits when unemployment is this high,” said **Melissa Boteach, Campaign Manager for Half in Ten.**

The poll reveals diverse and strong support for the federal benefit programs across all geographic regions, educational and socioeconomic levels, political affiliations and races.

- Democrats and independents, for example, overwhelmingly agree that it is too early to cut benefits (83% and 80%, respectively), as do a majority of Republicans (55%).
- Democrats (82%), independents (70%), and a majority of midterm Republican voters (54%) all believe Congress should continue to provide benefits until the unemployment situation improves.
- African-Americans (79%) and Hispanics (68%) show particularly strong support for renewing the federal unemployment benefit programs.

The lame-duck Congress will have an extremely narrow window to reauthorize the benefits program between now and November 30<sup>th</sup>. When these programs expired last June, it took Congress seven weeks to enact reauthorizing legislation, in which time more than 2 million unemployed Americans and their families saw their unemployment benefits cut off.

“In 2010, these benefits have already helped 9.5 million job seekers and their families and pumped roughly \$6.8 billion into the economy every month. Americans understand how critical these benefits are, and that’s why they strongly support continuing these programs. Congress should show the same understanding and decisiveness and quickly reauthorize these programs to avoid a catastrophe right in the midst of the holiday season,” said Owens. “With the recovery still fragile and joblessness projected to remain high throughout 2011, it is critical that Congress renew the programs for a full-year – to prevent the harm caused by short-term stop-gap renewals that fuel the insecurity and instability that neither jobless workers, their families nor our economy can afford.”

Without renewal of these programs – called Emergency Unemployment Compensation and Extended Benefits – newly unemployed workers would only be able to access state unemployment insurance programs, which typically offer up to 26 weeks of benefits. In October, the average length of unemployment edged up to 33.9 weeks, and the ranks of those out of work six months or more pushed past 6.2 million.

More detailed information on the consequences of federal benefit cut-offs, including state-by-state analysis of those affected in December 2010, is available in NELP’s recent report, [Out in the Cold for the Holidays](#), and the fact sheet, [A Long Road Ahead: Why Federal Benefit Extensions are Crucial to the Economy in 2011](#).

The Hart Research Associates poll interviewed 802 registered voters across the country from November 5 to 8, 2010, with a margin of error is  $\pm 3.5\%$  for the full sample. Click [here](#) for the Hart Research Associates memo on the results and [here](#) for a powerpoint.

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