



National Employment  
Law Project

Delivering Economic Opportunity

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**Statement of Christine L. Owens  
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On the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Social Security Act  
And the Unemployment Insurance Program  
August 13, 2010**

Tomorrow marks the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the Social Security Act of 1935 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. In the midst of the Great Depression, this signature New Deal legislation simultaneously established three major programs – Social Security retirement pensions, disability benefits and unemployment insurance - that continue to form the heart of the safety net for American workers today. Though assailed regularly by its partisan and ideological opponents, Social Security remains the greatest and most successful anti-poverty program in America’s history.

The nation’s current joblessness crisis is a clear and present reminder of the crucial role another New Deal crown jewel, the unemployment insurance program, plays in the lives of America’s families and in our economy. The core principle of the unemployment insurance system – that workers should have insurance against the risk of losing employment through no fault of their own – continues to reflect basic American values of community and investment in human potential. By helping unemployed workers pay for basic necessities like food and housing as they fight to regain their footing on the economic ladder, unemployment insurance has played a huge role in sustaining American families and boosting local economies.

When the first Secretary of Labor, Frances Perkins, advocated creating a program of unemployment insurance, even she may not have envisioned how well the program would stand the test of time. At this critical moment in America, we at NELP are proud to speak out for the vision of unemployment insurance as an essential compact between workers, business and government that is a vital piece of the road to economic recovery. And we are proud to stand with millions of workers, those who have jobs and those who seek them, in the fight to maintain a meaningful safety net that will allow all of America’s working families to pursue the promise of economic opportunity.

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