



From the National Employment Law Project
For Immediate Release: September 23, 2009
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House Overwhelmingly Approves Key Extension of Jobless Benefits for High-Unemployment States

Focus Shifts to Senate for Immediate Action to Provide Benefits to Laid-Off Workers in All States, Amid New Evidence of Surging Long-Term Unemployment

Washington, DC – Today the National Employment Law Project applauded the House of Representatives for taking quick action and an important first step in combating long-term unemployment by approving a necessary extension of jobless benefits. The House measure, which passed overwhelmingly by a vote of 331 to 83, reflected strong bipartisan support for workers and their families struggling to cope with the devastating hardships of unemployment in today's economy.

While the House vote was a critical first step in moving the extension through Congress in time to help hundreds of thousands of jobless workers who will run out of their federal benefits this month, it now sets the stage for the Senate to improve on the measure. The House bill provides 13 weeks of additional benefits to workers in high unemployment states, leaving workers in 23 states—those with unemployment rates below 8.5% (averaged over three months)—with no additional assistance after they exhaust their current unemployment benefits. The Senate can fill this void by providing additional benefits to workers in all states, in the process laying the groundwork for final legislation that will better meet the needs of all long-term jobless workers and their communities nationwide.

“Representative McDermott and the leadership of the House of Representatives have taken an important first step to address the crush of jobless workers exhausting their federal benefits, moving this critical legislation without delay. Now, it's the Senate's turn to act with equal haste and pass a bill to help workers in every state struggling against the odds to survive the hardships of unemployment. Every state has experienced record increases in unemployment and record numbers of workers filing for and exhausting their unemployment benefits, not just the states with highest unemployment,” said Maurice Emsellem, Policy Co-Director of the National Employment Law Project.

Today, NELP also released further evidence – available at <http://www.nelp.org/page/-/UI/LongTermChart.pdf> - documenting the crisis of long-term unemployment and the critical need for a strong extension of federal jobless benefits. NELP's analysis indicates that long-term unemployment – which affects five million workers still actively seeking jobs for six months or more – is rising at a rate

that far exceeds the increase in the overall unemployment rate. Since December 2008, the percent of jobless workers who find themselves long-term unemployed has increased nearly three times as fast as the unemployment rate for all Americans. NELP's analysis finds that there has been a 93% increase in long-term joblessness, compared to a 34% increase in the total unemployed.

In addition, NELP estimates that about 400,000 workers will lose federal jobless benefits by the end of this month, and 1.4 million workers will do so by the end of the year, absent Congressional action. If the latest extension is limited to high-unemployment states, 23 states would be denied extra assistance for unemployed workers. On average, the unemployment rate in these 23 states has increased by 59% in the past year compared to 70% for the states with unemployment rates exceeding 8.5%. And the number of workers exhausting their state unemployment benefits has increased by over 275% on average, compared to 200% for the higher unemployment states.

Last week, Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus noted that he would "shortly" introduce extension legislation as well. In its testimony before the Senate Finance Committee, available at <http://www.nelp.org/page/-/UI/NELPFinanceCommittee091509.pdf?nocdn=1> NELP urged Congress to pass several key reforms to expand and extend the unemployment safety net provisions of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act in order to respond effectively to the record high levels of long-term unemployment

“The first priority of Congress should be to expand unemployment benefits right away. But no state is spared from the crush of unemployment, and similarly no state should be spared much needed help, either. We applaud this week's House vote and look forward to further action right away from the Senate and Congress – the clock is ticking for thousands of workers who are counting on the safety net to come through,” Emsellem concluded.

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