



WomanView

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Tell Congress to Act Fast and Pass the Emergency Extended Unemployment Compensation Act to Extend Jobless Benefits

Today more workers are unemployed for a longer period than in previous recessions. This recession is different from the 2001 recession. The surge in energy prices, the subprime mortgage collapse, and the resulting credit crunch that shows no signs of improving make the current recession different. The subprime mortgage crisis has been elevated by the 2.2 million foreclosures filed in 2007, and 3.5 million more are expected by 2010. Energy prices continue to surge, resulting in the largest consumer price increase in 17 years. The official national unemployment rate was 4.3 percent in March 2001, compared to the March 2008 rate of 5.1 percent. Long-term joblessness affects everyone. Men account for almost 57 percent of all unemployed workers, and those over age 45 account for 37 percent of long-term joblessness. We have entered a critical time.

The U.S. Department of Labor reports three successive months of job losses. Three million people will run out of benefits before finding a new job. Last month the number of unemployed workers reached 434,000, and over the last three months the U.S. economy has eliminated 232,000 jobs. Another 1.34 million workers have already exhausted their state benefits. The labor market has been hit the hardest. In March the job market lost 80,000, the largest monthly decline in five years.

To help assist jobless workers, Rep. Jim McDermott (D-WA) and Rep. Phil English (R-PA) have introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives the Emergency Extended Unemployment Compensation Act (H.R. 5749). Congress should act swiftly and on a bipartisan basis. The legislation will provide up to 13 weeks of extended unemployment benefits in every state. Every state with an unemployment rate of 6 percent or higher will provide an additional 13 weeks. For workers who have lost their jobs through no fault of their own, this legislation is the immediate assistance they need. Economists suggest that unemployment benefits sustain consumer confidence and consumer spending—necessary in today's economy. Most important, an extension of unemployment benefits will have a positive impact on the home foreclosure crisis. This is because families will use the benefits to cover the costs of their mortgages and rent.

H.R. 5749 went up for a vote on April 16 before the House Ways and Means Committee. The bill was met with some resistance; attempts were made to limit the 13-week extension to states with an unemployment rate higher than 5.1 percent (the national average). However, the bill was passed as introduced by a bipartisan vote of 23 to 13. The federal Unemployment Insurance trust fund will supply the money needed for the extension. The fight for this bill is not over. The bill still needs to go before the full House and then to the Senate. The National Employment Law Project (NELP) and other advocates, including the Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law, are making sure that happens. If you would like to find out how you can help urge your representative to support H.R. 5749, go to http://www.unemployedworkers.org/april_16th_action.cfm. If you

register with www.unemployedworkers.org (an initiative of NELP), you can find out more information about the current state of unemployment and the progress of the benefits extension fight. If you would like to read the text of the bill, go to <http://thomas.loc.gov/> and fill in the bill number, H.R. 5749.

For more information, contact [Wendy Pollack](mailto:wendypollack@povertylaw.org), director, Women's Law and Policy Project, Shriver Center, at 312.263.3830 ext. 238 or wendypollack@povertylaw.org.

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