

MONEY FOR THE UNDESERVING: MILLIONAIRES, PRISONERS AND EVEN THE DEAD RECEIVING JOBLESS BENEFITS



Unemployment benefits are meant to benefit those people who have no source of income and are meant to help them meet their very basic needs of food, health and shelter, until they can find a job. However, according to a Labor Department report, last fiscal year, around \$14 billion of unemployment benefits went into wrong undeserving hands. Most of this money went to people who were not entitled to them, amongst them people who had stopped looking for work, people who were working and earning a salary, people who had been fired or left their jobs on their own. Bizarre as it may seem, the list also included people serving terms and those who were already dead and even those who had millions in their coffers. According to the Congressional Research Service upwards of 2000 millionaires received a total of \$20.8 million in benefits. U.S. Senator Tom Coburn, an Oklahoma Republican, said "Sending millionaires' unemployment checks is a case study in out-of-control spending. Providing welfare to the wealthy undermines the program for those who need it most while burdening future generations with senseless debt." According to the Chicago Tribune, prisoners in many states could be receiving unemployment checks, even though they are behind bars. An on-the-spot check by Illinois officials revealed that at least 420 prisoners were receiving them. If calculated the fraudulent payments could cost a total \$134,400 each week, a whopping \$7 million over the year. One of the requirements for receiving unemployment benefits is that the recipient must be ready and available for a job whenever a job is available and must also be actively seeking to be employed. This effectively rules out most inmates. Amazingly there are even dead people on the list. According to the Associated Press people who are no longer living are receiving unemployment benefits in New York State. Federal workers are also raking in money that they are not entitled to. Baltimore Sun reported that a worker earning \$9,700 was simultaneously taking home almost \$6000 in unemployment benefits. One of the main requirements of being eligible for unemployment checks is not having any work to do, and by extension no weekly check, but it was found that working people were taking advantage of loopholes and collecting unemployment even though they were getting a salary. Peoria Journal-Star reported that in Illinois alone 12,000 people wrongly collected unemployment benefits. Similarly those public workers, who had retired, were getting pensions and also their retirement benefits yet they continued to collect unemployment benefits. ABC news reports that in Massachusetts the problem became so severe that local leaders asked for stringent statewide reforms to address the issue. Workers fired for misconduct or indiscipline were not entitled to the benefits yet there have been many cases of such workers collecting unemployment benefits. The California Corrections Agency continued to wrongly pay the prison workers they had fired, for a period of two years. Misuse of unemployment benefits has been an issue that the local, state and federal governments have been confronted with for a long-long time. The government it seems lacks resources to monitor and patrol where the benefits are going. There are two ways in which people are taking advantage of the system, by fabricating information on applications that qualify them for the benefits. However, the more widespread abuse is by those who were already receiving the benefits genuinely but then get a job but do not inform the authorities and continue to milk the system to their advantage. Owing to this fraudulent disbursement the deserving and the needy have lost out on billions that could otherwise be redirected to them.