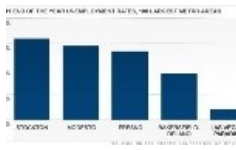


UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS DEAL DEADLINE LOOMING



Unemployment benefits help millions of Americans pay bills and medical costs when out of work due to an extended injury or illness. Close to two million Americans can lose those benefits by January if the deal for how benefits will be paid for is not reached soon. If the deal is not reached, millions more Americans will be affected past January. A one year extension on the deal would cost \$44 billion, and advocates of extended the deal are willing to foot the cost for the benefits. The advocates are also in favor of pushing the offsets three years down the road. "I'm not saying it's going to be easy," said Judy Conti, federal advocacy coordinator with the National Employment Law Project. "We want to extend benefits and nobody is fighting this time for it not to be offset. This economy cannot afford to have \$90 billion in economic activity lost. Who in their right mind would let that happen it's insane to contemplate it." The upcoming holidays and the election of 2012 could have a profound impact on how quickly this deal gets resolved, which could help the public reclaim their benefits, with the deal expiring at the end of 2011. "We're not close to figuring out how it's going to happen, it's like everything else," Conti said. "There are a lot of moving parts and there has to be something attractive for Republicans and attractive to Democrats. It is on everybody's radar screen and it's true no one is talking about it. Everyone is aware of the looming deadline and they know they have to take some action." The extension of the benefits will only cover those who have exhausted their 26 weeks of state insurance coverage or who are in the midst of navigating the federal tiers of the program. The deal will not extend benefits beyond 99 weeks. Christine Owens, executive director of NELP, had the following to say: "For millions of out-of-work Americans hanging on by a thread, unemployment insurance is the only thing preventing a free-fall into destitution and despair. For struggling businesses and the halting economy, unemployment insurance is what's preserving consumer spending at a moment we need it most. Withdrawing this crucial stimulus would likely tip the nation back into recession." More than 17 million Americans have received unemployment insurance over the past three years, which has pumped over \$180 billion back into the towns and communities, which has helped struggling economies across the country. States that could face early cut-offs of the benefits include New Jersey, California, Texas, New York and Florida. "We are mired in a national crisis of long-term unemployment. Not since the Great Depression have so many people been out of work for so long. This is not the time to cut back on federal unemployment insurance," Owens said. With our economy so fragile, long-term unemployment so high, and the job market so weak, the stakes could not be greater or the consequences of inaction more severe. Congress must step up and pass the President's proposal to reauthorize federal unemployment insurance programs through 2012, as part of the broader jobs bill initiative being debated in the Senate this week."