

OCCUPY COLUMBIA PROTESTS AT STATE EMPLOYMENT OFFICE



On Thursday, 30 members of the Occupy Columbia group marched from Finlay Park to the state's employment office. Their goal was to send a message to the South Carolina government, specifically the congressional delegation, that it should vote to extend unemployment benefits before the deal runs out at the end of the year. Occupy Columbia claims that in South Carolina alone there are 30,400 residents who are scheduled to lose their unemployment benefits should the extension not go through a positive vote. Protestors also made a claim that if the benefits were to expire, then \$7 million per week would be removed from the state's economy. "You can't support corporate welfare and then cut benefits to people," said 21-year-old Dillon Corbett, a member of Occupy Columbia, according to [The State](#). "We can't let people go hungry, especially around the holidays. We have to make people aware of what's going on in Washington." Virginia Sanders, a member of the South Carolina Progressive Network, said, "This is a Bible Belt state, but people are not acting like Christians. They're taking food out of the mouths of babies." Since October 15, the members of Occupy Columbia have been camping on the State House lawn. Governor Nikki Haley has attempted multiple times to have the protestors removed from the site. On December 14, the protestors are scheduled to appear in federal court to ask a federal judge for an injunction against South Carolina. If the injunction is granted, the protestors would be allowed to protest during overnight hours indefinitely. The protestors meet and chanted for a couple of hours in the parking lot of the state's employment office. Some of the signs had messages such as, "I lost my job and found an occupation" and "Les Miserables: The 99%." Occupy Columbia members said that close to 75 other cities across the country held the same protests, including Washington, D.C., in an effort to make a point about the extension of unemployment benefits. Congress has yet to decide if it should continue the extended benefit program, which is set to expire on December 31, 2011. Close to 99 weeks of benefits are provided to the unemployed by the program that live in states with high unemployment rates. John Silvia, the chief economist for Wells Fargo Bank, said that a compromise should be reached on both bills. He made this statement at the Darla Moore School of Business at the University of South Carolina on Wednesday. Until an agreement is reached on the bills, Kyle Lacio of West Columbia will continue to protest with Occupy Columbia to make sure the issue comes to light. "We're trying to help people who can't afford a lobbyist," he said. "We're going to keep pushing."

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