

## STRUGGLE TO FIND JOBS IN MICHIGAN



Last week, the extension of federal jobless benefits was announced, which means the lifeline for thousands of Michigan's unemployed were renewed. Virona Brown is one of the thousands in the state who will begin 2012 with zero job prospects because of unreturned calls about jobs and no unemployment check to pay her basic necessities, according to LSJ.com. The unemployment rate for Michigan dropped to 9.8 percent last month, and the woman from Lansing says she is still struggling to find employment within the region. "I am no stranger to working. I have been working and paying taxes since I was 13 years old," said Brown, 31, a single mother of two. "I have been working steadily my entire life, and no one will give me a chance." There were Republicans who fought the extension of the benefits, claiming that the benefits encourage people without jobs to continue their lives without jobs. Democrats say that the benefits provide a safety net for those who are looking for jobs and need help paying the bills. The jobless benefits offered by Michigan were lowered from 26 weeks to 20 weeks, with a maximum of \$362 weekly, but federal benefits provide up to an additional 53 weeks of compensation. "The benefits are critical," said Kenneth Hazlett, a Williamston resident who has been unemployed since March. "Without the federal support, I am not sure what my options would be, other than going into my 401(k), for survival. This is a way for me to stay in the game (looking for a job) and not panic." Hazlett moved to Michigan from Rochester, New York back in September. He is a former TV news videographer, who receives around \$405 weekly in unemployment benefits from the federal government. He still has to rely on his parents from time to time for help with paying the bills. Hazlett spends most of his day on the computer looking for a new job. He has applied for close to 40 jobs since September in emergency dispatch, public relations, and customer service-related positions. He has since received only two callbacks for job interviews out of the 40 applications submitted. "Twenty years ago, I would mail somebody a letter, and I would get a letter back," Hazlett said. "Now, I don't even get an acknowledgment that they received the letter." The CEO of Capital Arena Michigan Works, Doug Stites, said that job opportunities have expanded for skilled workers in the city of Lansing within the previous year. A lot of unskilled workers in the state are still struggling to find work. "We're packed right before the holidays," Stites said of his agency, which offers computers and resources for those searching for jobs. "I know there is still not sufficient work yet for everyone who desires employment."

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