

NEVADA RESIDENTS TO LOSE JOBLESS BENEFITS BECAUSE OF FALL IN JOBLESS RATE



Sometimes the good news is tailed by the bad, making the elation of the good news short-lived. For Nevadans to this has been a bitter sweet week. The state's unemployment rate dropped, which was good news, that its workers were at last finding work, but it also meant that the improved rate meant that the state was no more eligible for State Extended Benefits (SEB). "It's hard enough out there. I don't know what to do anymore," said Mary Pfeiffer, who has been unemployed since November. Essentially, Nevada no longer qualifies for the federally funded program because their unemployment rate has fallen. The eligibility rule says that in order to qualify, a state must have a three-month average unemployment rate that remains at least 10 percent higher than the corresponding months in any one of the three prior years. What is galling to the Nevadans is that there disqualifying average is just .2 percent lower than the current three-month average is 11.8 percent. In order to meet the threshold, it would have needed to be 12.0 percent or higher. "SEB is pretty much the last tier of the benefit program. So those are the people who are going to lose those benefits. These are people who have pretty much been out of work for some time and have been on unemployment for quite a while," explained Mae Worthey, with the Nevada Department of Employment, Training and Rehabilitation. Those benefits are part of a federally funded program, available to high unemployment states, for people whose basic jobless benefits ran out. Around 5,500 Nevada residents are collecting those benefits, which provide up to 20 additional weeks of unemployment checks. "The unfortunate part about people being cut off of SEB is that they're being immediately cut off. So they may have been expecting to still receive benefits for a certain number of weeks and they're going to be abruptly cut off immediately," said Worthey. Mary Pfeiffer said the news was definitely a shock, "I didn't know what to do. I'm like I can't find a job, I don't have benefits, what are we supposed to do?" But in order to continue that funding, Nevada's three-month unemployment rate average needed to be 12-percent or higher. The state recently came in at 11.8-percent. "Of course we are seeing things improve; people are starting to go back to work. But still, there are a number of people who are out of work and they are still being affected by this economic situation we're dealing with in the state," said Worthey. Despite the benefits coming to an end, the ultimate goal is to get people, like Mary Pfeiffer, back to work. In just two days, the State Extended Benefits (SEB) program will expire in Nevada. Thousands of people who rely on a government check will see that funding cease. Essentially, Nevada no longer qualifies for the federally funded program because our unemployment rate has fallen. In order to qualify, a state must have a three-month average unemployment rate that remains at least 10 percent higher than the corresponding months in any one of the three prior years. Nevada's current three-month average is 11.8 percent. In order to meet the threshold, it would have needed to be 12.0 percent or higher. "I've been looking (for work). There's not much out there," said Joe Rixey. Rixey relies on SEB. A former timeshare salesperson, he was laid off three years ago. Rixey has been receiving \$250 a week through SEB. "It's hard. It's really hard. I've got a disabled wife. She's on Social Security, so we get enough money to pay for the rent, but there are other bills," Rixey said. Jose Evangelista is in even worse shape. He lost his job as a technician last year and relies solely on SEB to get by. "I have to find a new job now. I keep trying to find it every week, but they never call me," Evangelista said. "It's eye-opening to many because it will affect their livelihoods until employment is reached," said LaTonya Wells with Nevada JobConnect, a network that connects businesses with potential employees. Wells said this came at a time when Nevada JobConnect's Las Vegas office sees an average of 250 job seekers a day. If there's a silver lining, it's that Nevada JobConnect has 850 job openings in southern Nevada and 1,500 statewide. Nevada JobConnect also offers services for the unemployed, such as resume help. SEB was designed to help people who have exhausted an initial unemployment claim and three federal extensions.