



Continued Long-term Unemployment Underscores Need to Extend Unemployment Insurance

December 20, 2013

As people of faith, we continue to be concerned about our country's slow economic recovery. [With this month's release of unemployment rates](#) from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, we see yet another sign that while the recession has ended, access to a good job – or any job – remains out of reach for millions of Americans.

The unemployment rate dropped to 7.0% in November, down from 7.3% in October. The economy added 203,000 jobs in November. The unemployment rates among specific worker groups changed little from October: the unemployment rates for adult men was 6.7%, adult women 6.2%, whites 6.2%, blacks 12.5%, Hispanics 8.7%, and Asians 5.3%.

Despite the news that the overall unemployment rate continues to drop, November's numbers show the long-term unemployed are still struggling. The number of long-term unemployed (those jobless for 27 weeks or more) remained at near-record levels – 4.1 million in November, or more than one-third of all unemployed. The number of long-term unemployed is [higher than in any month during the Great Recession](#), which economists tell us ended in June 2009.

In every recession since the mid-1950s, the Federal government has passed legislation providing extended unemployment benefits to unemployed workers who exhaust their state unemployment benefits. The most recent recession was no exception – Congress passed an Emergency Unemployment Compensation program in June 2008 and has extended the benefits every year since. These benefits are a lifeline to those who have their jobs during an economic downturn and face additional difficulties in finding work because of a sluggish economy.

Federal unemployment benefits are due to expire on December 28, and so far Congress has not acted to extend those benefits. If Congress does nothing, [1.3 million Americans will lose their benefits immediately. Another 850,000 will lose their benefits in 2014.](#) Such an abrupt loss of benefits will have a devastating impact on those who are already struggling to keep their families afloat. Our economy will take a hit as well – if Congress fails to extend unemployment benefits, [the economy will lose up to 300,000 jobs in 2014.](#)

Congress has never before allowed unemployment benefits to lapse with so many long-term unemployed Americans still struggling. Previously, unemployment benefits were allowed to expire when the [long-term unemployment rate as a share of the labor force was at 1.3% or lower](#). Today, the long-term unemployment rate is twice that level at 2.6%. The long-term unemployed have earned their benefits by paying taxes into the system for years. Congress would deny them help when it is needed most by allowing the program to lapse.

As we consider these monthly reflections of our economy's health, we urge members of Congress to extend unemployment benefits before they adjourn for the year. As scripture tells us, "If among you, one of your brothers should become poor, in any of your towns within your land that the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, but you shall open your hand to him and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be." Deuteronomy 15:7-8.

You can find DHN's Jobs Statement of Principles at <http://domestichumanneeds.org/uploads/DHN-Jobs-Statement-of-Principles.pdf>.

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