



National Employment Law Project

TIMELINE OF GROWING SUPPORT FOR EXTENDING FEDERAL UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS

August 11, 2009

AUGUST 2: Democratic Congressman Charles Rangel, chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, and Republican Senator Jim DeMint.ⁱ

Reacting to NELP's recent projections of workers set to exhaust their federal benefits, reported in the *New York Times*, Rep. Rangel and Senator DeMint agreed on *Fox News Sunday* that Congress should extend benefits.

Rangel said that the unemployed are "the true victims of this fiscal disaster. And I do hope that the Republicans will come forward and realize by giving assistance to these people, they're allowing them to be able to put food on the table, to pay their rent and their mortgages."

After Rangel called extending benefits "right" and "moral," DeMint agreed that Democrats and Republicans "need to take care of those who are unemployed" and that "we'll definitely support that."

AUGUST 2: National Economic Council Director Larry Summers.ⁱⁱ

On NBC's *Meet the Press*, Summers said that the administration will "work with Congress to make sure that unemployment insurance continues to perform its basic function of protecting the unemployed. That was an important element in the recovery and reinvestment program. It's helped people who've become unemployed; it also helped the economy by maintaining spending."

On CBS's *Face the Nation*, Summers reiterated the point, saying that the administration plans to "work with Congress to make sure that the unemployment insurance benefits that are necessary for the American people are maintained."

AUGUST 2: Christina Romer, Head of the Council of Economic Advisors.ⁱⁱⁱ

Romer said on CNN's *State of the Union* that an expansion of federal jobless benefits is "absolutely something that we're working with Congress to do" and is "absolutely on the table."

AUGUST 3: White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs.^{iv}

During a White House Briefing, when Gibbs was asked about unemployment, including if the administration considers an extension of unemployment benefits to be a second stimulus, his response included saying:

“...Over the course of the next few months you're going to have people that will exhaust the benefit cycle that they're in. Then on December 31, you'll have an expiration of some of the Recovery Act parts that extended unemployment for those that had -- that were dealing with the recession long before Washington became aware of it.

“The President and the economic team believe that extending those benefits and ensuring that the unemployed can get what they need and continue looking for work is tremendously important... I don't know what you call it, except ensuring that we're taking care of those that have fallen on hard times.

“...I think the President remains concerned that we get this economy moving again and creating jobs for the millions of Americans that have lost them in this recession, and that's what he'll continue to work on.”

AUGUST 6: White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs.^v

At another White House briefing, when asked if passing more extended federal benefits “is a top priority,” Gibbs said, simply, “Yes.” He also explained:

“...Between now and the end of the year... you will have people exhaust that benefit. We're very concerned about that. Obviously that's been a -- was a big part of the Recovery Act and something that we want to see, and I think there's bipartisan support to see, continued.

“At the same time, we're also looking at working to continue benefits that were extended as part of the recovery plan itself... both kind of a short-term and more of a medium- to long-term issue that the administration is concerned about and wants to work with Congress to ensure that we are continuing to help those that are victims of a struggling economy who are looking and actively participating in a job search to help support their families. And we're definitely committed to that.”

AUGUST 7: White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs.^{vi}

Speaking to reporters after the release of new jobless numbers showed 247,000 jobs were lost in July, the fewest in a year, Gibbs called the numbers “more evidence that we have pulled back from the edge and away from the brink of a depression.” Despite the good news, Gibbs said:

“None of us loses sight, though, of the fact that last month a quarter million people lost their job. The long-term unemployment rate is increasing, and people are going to begin

exhausting their... extended unemployment benefits soon. While the number itself shows that we're losing fewer jobs this month, obviously we've got a lot of work to do."

The same day, at a press briefing, Gibbs explained: "Again, we have seen that decline in job loss. That's a good thing. There are numbers within this report that aren't as positive— long-term unemployment is at its highest ever."

AUGUST 7: Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid.^{vii}

Senator Reid, as reported in Reuters, said that "There is an economic case to be made for extending unemployment benefits," and that "Soon after Congress returns to Washington we'll need to address this matter." He continued: "We must help those who are suffering as a result of an economic crisis they did not create."

AUGUST 7: House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.^{viii}

In reaction to the "better than expected" jobless numbers, Speaker Pelosi said: "Millions of Americans remain unemployed, and we must redouble our efforts on their behalf; unemployment figures are cold comfort to those grappling with daily survival."

AUGUST 7: House Education and Labor Chairman Rep. George Miller and Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Chairman Senator Edward Kennedy.

In a joint statement, Rep. Miller and Senator Kennedy called the decline in unemployment "very good news for working families" that "shows that President Obama's economic recovery program is working."

They added: "Even in the midst of this promising news, it's clear we still have a long way to go. More than 5 million Americans have been looking for work for more than six months, without success. We must do more to help these working families keep food on their tables and hope in their hearts. An extension of unemployment benefits should be at the top of Congress's agenda when we return in the fall."

AUGUST 7: Senator Jack Reed (RI).^{ix}

Senator Reed, author of the bipartisan legislation passed in November 2008 to extend \$6 billion of jobless benefits and additional help to states with unemployment rates above the national average, announced that he introduced the "Assistance for Unemployed Workers Extension Act" (S. 1647). The legislation would extend several current-law unemployment compensation programs through 2010, and also provides an additional 13 weeks of unemployment insurance for workers who have exhausted benefits in states that have an unemployment rate at or above 8.5 percent.

Reed said of his bill: "Without this legislation, nationally over half a million workers are expected to exhaust their benefits by the end of September, and another 1.5 million are estimated to run out of coverage by the

end of the year. This is an extraordinary number of Americans who will face life without a paycheck or an unemployment check during the worst economy since the Great Depression. Providing basic support for those who are out of work through no fault of their own assures Americans can provide for their families and keep a roof over their heads, stemming the tide of foreclosures and the deterioration of neighborhoods... With roughly one job opening for every five job seekers, it's imperative that we act quickly to extend joblessness benefits to Americans who need it most and to states like Rhode Island that have been hit hardest. As has been the case with past extensions, I look forward to working on a bipartisan basis to pass this legislation.”

Cosponsors of the legislation include Senators Durbin, Schumer, Boxer, Lautenberg, Levin, Stabenow, Whitehouse, Kerry, Menendez, Cardin, Brown, Begich, Burris, and Franken.

ⁱ http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2009/08/02/senator_demint_rep_pence_and_rangel_on_fox_news_sunday_97744.html

ⁱⁱ http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2009/08/02/larry_summers_on_meet_the_press_97745.html;

http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2009/08/02/transcript_larry_summers_face_the_nation_97743.html

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0908/02/sotu.01.html>

^{iv} http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Briefing-by-White-House-Press-Secretary-Robert-Gibbs-8/3/09/

^v http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Briefing-by-White-House-Press-Secretary-Robert-Gibbs-8/6/09/

^{vi} [http://blogs.abcnews.com/politicalpunch/2009/08/the-gibbs-gaggle/comments/page/2/;](http://blogs.abcnews.com/politicalpunch/2009/08/the-gibbs-gaggle/comments/page/2/)

http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Briefing-by-White-House-Press-Secretary-Robert-Gibbs-8/7/09/

^{vii} <http://www.reuters.com/article/politicsNews/idUSTRE57637920090807>

^{viii} <http://www.speaker.gov/blog/?p=1910>

^{ix} <http://reed.senate.gov/newsroom/details.cfm?id=316957>