

Durbin: We Must Provide Quick Relief For Unemployed Americans

February 7 2021 6:55 AM



SPRINGFIELD – As millions of Americans continue to struggle with unemployment as a result of the pandemic, U.S. Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) today discussed the critical need to provide additional assistance to unemployed workers before federal unemployment programs expire in March. Joined virtually by several Illinoisans relying on unemployment insurance, Durbin called on Congress to pass President Biden’s American Rescue Plan COVID relief package, which would extend federal unemployment programs through September, and would continue enhanced unemployment benefits at \$400 per week.

“I have heard from countless Illinoisans who are worried about losing their health coverage, putting food on the table, keeping a roof over their head, and paying off debt. We urgently need to pass additional relief legislation to address this national crisis—and we need to do it before unemployment programs expire in March,” Durbin said. “I am committed to quickly working to ensure that we pass a relief package that provides

relief to unemployed Americans and extends federal unemployment benefits to help jobless workers weather this storm.”

As of January 16, nearly 18 million Americans were claiming unemployment benefits, and 166,000 Illinoisans were claiming Pandemic Unemployment Assistance, and 168,000 were claiming Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation.

The *CARES Act*, passed by Congress in March 2020, provided an additional \$600 in unemployment benefits through the end of July. In December, Congress passed new legislation that extended federal unemployment benefits, including an extra \$300 per week for all workers, through March 14, 2021. President Biden’s proposed rescue plan would build on the December COVID relief bill, which, along with extending federal unemployment programs, would provide assistance for small businesses, increase funding for SNAP benefits, and direct cash relief, along with funding for vaccine logistics, testing, and PPE.

This week, Durbin reintroduced two pieces of legislation that would provide additional support to unemployed workers:

Yesterday, Durbin reintroduced the [*Worker Health Coverage Protection Act*](#), which would ensure that millions of workers laid off as a result of the pandemic are able to remain on their employer-sponsored health insurance, through the COBRA program, at no cost.

On Tuesday, he reintroduced the [*Coronavirus Unemployment Benefits Tax Relief Act*](#), which would provide tax relief for Americans who lost their jobs and utilized unemployment benefits last year – allowing millions of workers to focus their benefits on covering essentials during the pandemic and recession. The bill would temporarily exclude the first \$10,200 of unemployment compensation from federal income taxes in 2020.