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Extending an Economic Lifeline

Dear Friend,

Greg is forty-four years old and he's worked all of his adult life. Until now. This married father of two young children in Butler County is collecting unemployment insurance. With each paycheck earned over the years, Greg's employers paid into the federal unemployment insurance program on his behalf.

He now receives a weekly unemployment check which is less than half of his former take home pay. But with his wife's income, they are able to tread water until he finds another job. Greg is not alone.

If Congress doesn't act swiftly, tens of thousands of Ohioans like Greg will have no economic life boat. That's why I'm urging that we move swiftly to extend unemployment benefits for the 88,000 Ohioans and more than 2 million Americans who will lose UI benefits by the end of 2010.



Unfortunately, every Republican Senator signed a letter to the Senate Majority Leader last week saying they would block nearly all legislation, including an extension of unemployment insurance, unless Congress extends the Bush tax cuts for the wealthiest two percent of Americans. While I strongly support extending the middle class tax cuts that will help 98 percent of Americans, I cannot justify increasing the deficit by \$700 billion to give tax cuts to millionaires and billionaires, while Congress fails to spend even one penny to prevent millions of unemployed Americans from falling into poverty.

Rather than politicize unemployment, we need to start acknowledging that the unemployed are not statistics; they are everyday Americans fighting for work against steep odds.

Ohioans of all backgrounds, from small towns and major cities, send letters to me sharing their stories about the need to extend unemployment insurance. I've read many of their letters on the Senate floor to remind my colleagues that Ohioans are not at fault for being unemployed; they are looking for work in an environment where jobs are scarce. These Americans do not want to fall into poverty and be forced to rely on Social Safety net programs like food stamps, but if we in Congress don't take action, how else will they protect their families? This isn't a minor problem, it's a major crisis.

For every one job opening in the U.S., there are five



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applicants. Ohioans like Timothy from Fairfield – who has worked in the manufacturing field for years— have been applying for retail jobs, janitorial jobs, and maintenance jobs for months only to be rejected, either because they are overqualified or because someone from the line of applicants ahead of or behind them got the job. These Ohioans and their families now have to enter the cold winter months worrying about whether or not they can afford to pay the heat bill. In his letter to me, Timothy explained that he applied for a job at a sporting goods store that received over 3,000 applications for that one position.



Unemployment insurance doesn't just affect the laid-off worker, it affects entire families. Stacie, a teacher in Meigs County, is the mother of three school-aged honor students, one with moderate Cerebral Palsy. Her husband has been unemployed for 18 months. Like many Ohioans, Stacie's family has worked very hard to adjust to a change in financial circumstances. Should her husband lose unemployment benefits, they will be forced to carve out another \$450 per week from the family budget.



Stacie states plainly, "we need to feed our family. Please vote to extend the unemployment benefits for all unemployed workers who are trying to better themselves during this economic crisis."

Extending unemployment insurance isn't just the right thing to do for those seeking jobs and their families; it's the right thing to do for our economy. Extending unemployment compensation puts money directly into communities – at the local grocery store, the hardware store, the gas station, and all of that generates economic activity. For every dollar spent, unemployment insurance yields \$1.64 in economic activity.

Unemployment compensation is an insurance program; it is not a welfare program. Your employer pays into the system while you are working to help insure you if you get laid-off through no fault of your own. And as economists will tell you, employees actually "pay" for unemployment insurance themselves, because their wages are reduced to cover the dollars employers put into the unemployment system.

Ohio's unemployment rate has decreased to 9.9 percent and we've seen 16 consecutive months of private sector job creation. We're moving in the right direction, but too many people are looking for jobs but can't find them. While we should acknowledge incremental improvements, this is not a time to abandon American families who are struggling to make ends meet. It is in no one's best interests for Congress to twiddle its thumbs while more American families sink into poverty.



Historically, Congress has never failed to extend unemployment insurance when the unemployment rate was above 7.2%. Today, national unemployment stands at 9.8%. Some things don't change over time: Americans still believe in the Golden Rule and unemployment insurance still has a positive impact on the economy.

Extending unemployment benefits is the right thing to do and the smart thing to do. Congress needs to do it. Now.

Sincerely,



Sherrod Brown
U.S. Senator



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