

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 22, 2010

The Honorable Harry Reid
Majority Leader
United States Senate
S-221, U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Max Baucus
Chairman, Finance Committee
United States Senate
511 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader Reid and Chairman Baucus,

We are writing to urge an extension of unemployment benefits and eligibility for the COBRA Premium Assistance Program through December 31, 2010. As our nation continues to battle double digit unemployment rates, we must act right away to continue vital safety net coverage for the American family.

We appreciate your leadership in December in securing a two-month extension to both of these programs in the Department of Defense Appropriations bill. But recent employment numbers are an indication that we must immediately extend jobless benefits and health assistance for individuals and families squeezed in this tighter economy. Nearly 40 percent of the unemployed – more than 6.1 million people – have been out of work for six months or longer. The average duration of unemployment is now at 29.1 weeks.

What is more, many of those individuals and their families lost their health coverage when they lost their jobs. On average, a monthly healthcare premium payment to cover a family costs \$1,111, which represents 83.4% of the average unemployment check. In some states, the average unemployment check is less than the cost of a monthly healthcare plan premium.

Based on these figures, Congress must extend unemployment benefits and eligibility for the COBRA Premium Assistance Program through the end of the year. Short term extensions, while still helpful to families, only add strain to state agencies that must constantly re-tool their computer systems, and at the same time, continue to assist the millions still searching for work. As our economy continues on a path to recovery, we need a robust extension of safety net programs that have provided a lifeline to families since the recession began.

We urge quick action on the extension of the unemployment insurance provisions in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act through December 31, 2010, including the Emergency Unemployment Compensation Program, full federal funding of the Extended Benefit

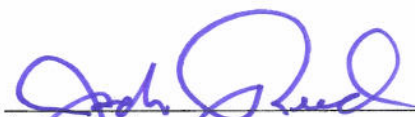
program, an increase of \$25 per week in state and federal benefits, and the suspension of the federal income tax on an individual's first \$2,400 of unemployment benefits. In addition, we must also extend the eligibility period of the COBRA Premium Assistance Program through December 31, 2010.

Due to the importance of these issues, we respectfully request a meeting with you to discuss how we can provide for an extension of both programs. We thank you for your consideration of our request. All of our offices are committed to ensuring our constituents are able to properly provide for their families during this difficult time.

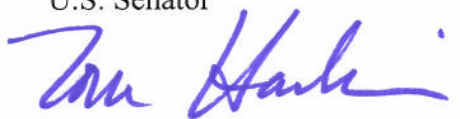
Sincerely,



Robert P. Casey, Jr.
U.S. Senator



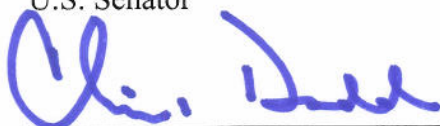
Jack Reed
U.S. Senator



Tom Harkin
U.S. Senator



Sherrod Brown
U.S. Senator



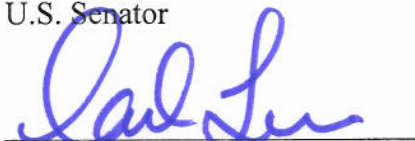
Christopher J. Dodd
U.S. Senator



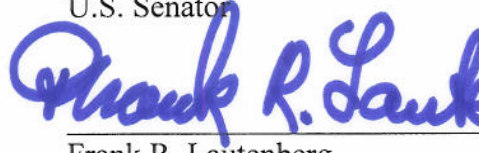
Jeanne Shaheen
U.S. Senator



Al Franken
U.S. Senator



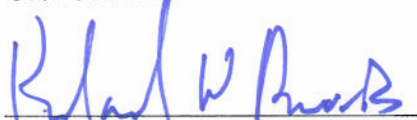
Carl Levin
U.S. Senator



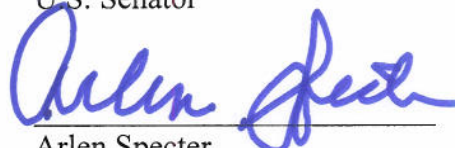
Frank R. Lautenberg
U.S. Senator



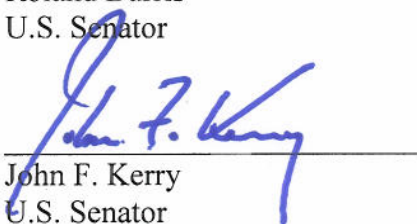
Debbie Stabenow
U.S. Senator



Roland Burris
U.S. Senator



Arlen Specter
U.S. Senator



John F. Kerry
U.S. Senator



Kirsten E. Gillibrand
U.S. Senator

Ron Wyden

Ron Wyden
U.S. Senator

Sheldon Whitehouse

Sheldon Whitehouse
U.S. Senator

Bernard Sanders

Bernard Sanders
U.S. Senator

Robert Menendez

Robert Menendez
U.S. Senator

Tom Udall

Tom Udall
U.S. Senator

Robert C. Byrd

Robert C. Byrd
U.S. Senator

Barbara A. Mikulski

Barbara A. Mikulski
U.S. Senator

Dianne Feinstein

Dianne Feinstein
U.S. Senator

John D. Rockefeller, IV

John D. Rockefeller, IV
U.S. Senator

Edward E. Kaufman

Edward E. Kaufman
U.S. Senator

Barbara Boxer

Barbara Boxer
U.S. Senator

Patrick J. Leahy

Patrick J. Leahy
U.S. Senator

Herb Kohl

Herb Kohl
U.S. Senator

Ben Cardin

Benjamin L. Cardin
U.S. Senator

Daniel K. Akaka

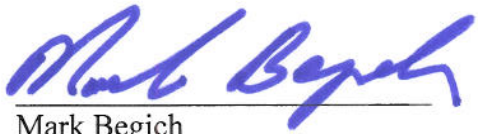
Daniel K. Akaka
U.S. Senator

Jeffrey A. Merkley

Jeff Merkley
U.S. Senator

Michael F. Bennet

Michael F. Bennet
U.S. Senator



Mark Begich
U.S. Senator