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NELP Urges Congressional Conferees to Reject Proposed Barriers to Benefits in Unemployment Insurance Extension

Washington, DC—As House and Senate conferees get ready to negotiate a path forward on reauthorization of the federal unemployment insurance (UI) programs through the end of 2012, they must reject a series of proposals contained in H.R. 3630 which would erect harmful new barriers to state UI benefits, stigmatize unemployed workers, and undermine the foundation of the UI system, according to a new [legislative analysis](#) issued today by the National Employment Law Project .

NELP's analysis, titled "[Sticking to Principles](#)," examines in detail each of the proposals put forth by House Republicans under the guise of UI "reforms," including proposed waivers of federal UI protections, mandatory drug-testing of claimants, high-school or GED preconditions for receipt of benefits, and allowing states to reduce weekly benefit amounts.

"What the House has offered not only drastically slashes the duration of federal UI benefits for long-term unemployed workers in the hardest-hit states, but it would also institute mean-spirited and punitive measures that have no place in our nation's unemployment insurance program," said NELP executive director Christine Owens. "When Senate and House conferees convene later this month to consider the extensions of federal unemployment insurance, the payroll tax and other provisions, they should reject these insidious attempts to deny hardworking Americans ready access to the unemployment insurance benefits they deserve."

"When millions of unemployed Americans are looking to their Congress to renew unemployment insurance for the full year, thus far they've seen more reckless brinksmanship, proposals to slash weeks of available benefits, and obnoxious new insults like the proposal to start mandatory drug-testing of UI claimants," Owens said. "Instead of treating unemployed workers as lazy, uneducated, drug users and throwing up more obstacles to them receiving their unemployment insurance benefits, what we should be doing is investing in creating good jobs and providing adequate funding to help job seekers find new employment."

In its latest analysis, NELP details how the provisions in H.R. 3630 would:

- Make it harder for ordinary Americans who lose their jobs to access their unemployment insurance;
- Subject workers to mandatory drug tests;
- Disqualify workers who were not fortunate enough to finish high school; and
- Allow states to experiment with new workfare-type requirements that have no place in a social insurance program.

"Far from being 'reforms,' these barriers to benefits are politically motivated solutions in search of problems," the NELP analysis states. The group urges Congressional conferees to reject these proposals and, instead, provide increased support to states for proven job-search assistance and reemployment programs.

“The House proposals in H.R. 3630 would open the doors to dismantling unemployment insurance—a program that is one of the pillars of the Social Security Act—at a time when we should be strengthening this vital lifeline of social insurance for all Americans,” said Owens.

The National Employment Law Project is a non-partisan, not-for-profit organization that conducts research and advocates on issues affecting low-wage and unemployed workers. For more about NELP, visit www.nelp.org.

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