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DEMOCRATIC SENATORS URGE SWIFT PASSAGE OF UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS EXTENSION

WASHINGTON, DC – Fourteen Democratic Senators today called on Senate Republicans to stop playing politics and immediately help pass legislation that will provide relief to jobless workers by extending unemployment insurance for the nearly 2 million Americans who will exhaust their benefits by the end of the year. The pending bill would extend unemployment insurance by up to 14 additional weeks for jobless workers in all states and up to 20 weeks in hard-hit states with unemployment levels at or above 8.5 percent. According to the Congressional Budget Office, this extension would be fully offset. Every \$1 spent on unemployment benefits has been found to generate \$1.61 in new economic demand.

7.6 million Americans have lost their jobs and the deficit has grown massively since the recession began under President Bush in 2007. Now, hundreds of thousands of Americans have exhausted unemployment insurance benefits and another million are expected to exhaust these benefits by the end of this year.

Despite the urgent economic imperative, Republicans have held up the bill for nearly two weeks by offering amendments that have nothing to do with helping the unemployed.

“We can stand together now, pass this vital piece of legislation, and provide families with the means to stay in their homes and pay the bills as they look for work in these extraordinarily turbulent times. Or, Republicans can continue to prevent thousands of their own constituents from getting desperately needed assistance,” said **Reed**. “Slow-walking these benefits doesn’t just hurt individuals and families; it is bad for businesses and the broader economy. Helping people stay afloat is not a partisan issue -- It is an urgent national issue that demands action now. And it is time for obstructionism to stop being the philosophy of too many Republicans.”

“The unemployment extension bill before the Senate is a great bill - one that will stimulate the economy and help unemployed workers across the country struggling to get back on their feet,”

said **Shaheen**. “Helping people who are about to lose a lifeline is the essence of what we do as public servants – that is why this delay is so disappointing. I ask those members who are holding up this urgent legislation for political purposes to do the right thing and pass this extension immediately.”

“The Unemployment Insurance program provides a vital safety net during times of economic hardship,” said **Harkin**. “Workers have paid into the system through their hard work, so when they are out of a job they deserve support to see them through tough times. These benefits are fundamental to helping families meet basic necessities – to provide a roof over their heads, to put food on the table, or to keep the heat on. I urge my colleagues to support this amendment and pass it without delay.”

“There is a general view that since much of the first stimulus package has not yet impacted the economy, a second one is not necessary. But unemployment benefits are the quickest, most effective form of economic stimulus because the dollars can get out the door fast and will be spent quickly at a time when we need the boost to consumer demand,” said **Schumer**.

“Michigan has the highest unemployment rate in the country,” said **Stabenow**. “Families in Michigan and across the country are struggling to put food on the table. Soon they will be hampered by home heating bills. This extension of unemployment benefits not only provides support when families need it most, it is also one of the fastest, most effective ways to stimulate our economy.”

“This unexpected battle over unemployment insurance is putting on display the irresponsible lengths to which our Republican colleagues are willing to go in their strategy of 'No'. They said no to a job-creating economic recovery package, no to health insurance reform, and now no to a safety net for Americans who can't find a job in the most severe economic downturn in generations. If we want to do what is right morally, and if we want to keep our economy afloat while the job creation engine gets back up to full speed, then we can't cut out unemployment insurance when many families need it the most,” said **Menendez**.

“Families are hurting. In every region of every state, there are people who cannot find jobs today. Minorities are being hit even harder. Extending unemployment benefits is the right thing to do for those who can't find employment and for our economy. We have to pass this now. There should be no obstacles put in the way of passing this bill promptly,” said **Cardin**.

“More than 14,000 Ohioans will exhaust their benefits this month if we do not act now,” said **Brown**. “Partisan delay of this legislation is a slap in the face to millions of American families. We need to pass this U.I. extension and we need to do it now. I strongly encourage my Republican colleagues to put politics aside and do the right thing.”

“Tens of thousands of Pennsylvanians have already lost their unemployment insurance and with it a means to help pay the bills as they struggle with long-term unemployment,” said **Casey**. “After previous bipartisan extensions under this Administration and the last the current obstruction is unconscionable and callous. Americans who have exhausted their benefits can't take an IOU to the grocery store or their mortgage lender while this extension is held up.”

“Unemployed individuals need assistance regardless of where they reside, and this compromise represents a fair and appropriate extension of benefits for workers in need,” said **Webb**. “I urge my Senate colleagues to move this legislation forward swiftly as it directly affects the livelihood of so many Americans during these difficult economic times.”

“While the economy has begun to stabilize, we are not yet out of the woods. We must make certain that those who have lost their jobs in Delaware and around the country will be able to put food on the table and take care of necessities for their families. This assistance will help those most in need stay on their feet until they can find a new job,” said **Kaufman**.

“1,000 Minnesotans lose their benefits every week. Our economy is making strides toward recovery, but until the job market is back, unemployment benefits are vital. It’s time for the Senate to work together to provide this needed relief as soon as possible,” said **Franken**.

“Unemployment benefits for 40,000 women and men in Massachusetts, and 1.3 million people across the United States, will run out by the holidays if we do not act to extend their unemployment insurance,” said **Kirk**. “I came to the United States Senate to try to give a voice and a vote for the people of Massachusetts during these critical painful months, and extending unemployment benefits for those who continue to look for work is exactly what we need to do, and do now.”

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Democratic Members of the Senate Hold News Conference on Extending Unemployment Benefits

REED:

I think we have a quorum, so we can begin.

I’m Senator Jack Reed. I want to thank my colleagues for coming together. And the presence of so many senators underscores the importance of extending unemployment compensation benefits: 7.6 million Americans have lost their jobs since 2007 in the waning days of the Bush administration and the Bush economy. Now hundreds of thousands of Americans have exhausted their benefits, and millions are expected to exhaust their benefits in the next several months.

We hear, all of my colleagues, from our constituents about not only the frustration, but the growing desperation about being without a job and facing the loss of benefits.

Democrats have introduced a bill to extend unemployment benefits for an additional 14 weeks in every state and for those states, like Rhode Island, with high unemployment an additional six weeks, for a total of 20. Right now, my state is 13 percent. In fact, sadly, we joust with the Michigan, I think, every reporting period to see who has the worst unemployment. That is not a competition we want to continue.

But we are facing opposition from the Republicans. They were quick to provide bailouts to Wall Street, but they fall at helping people on Main Street. They need the help, and they need it now.

Every state's been hit by this recession. Every state is seeing these problems. The Republicans have thrown up opposition in terms of requesting a CBO score, when we know it's fully paid for and it is fully offset. Now they're delaying passage by offering amendments that have nothing to do with unemployment. Instead of action, they're just simply saying no.

Slow-walking these benefits doesn't help individuals and families. It is bad for business and the broader economy. Every dollar of unemployment compensation benefits generates about \$1.61, \$1.60. That helps. Every day that we can't pass these benefits, it means fewer families have the means to provide for their children and themselves. It means less demand in our economy. After spending eight years of digging ourselves into a big hole, led by the Bush economic policies, now the Republicans are standing in the way of simply helping many Americans.

Let me now introduce Senator Jeanne Shaheen, who has been a great leader in this effort.

Senator Shaheen?

SHAHEEN:

Thank you very much, Senator Reed. And thank you for your leadership in trying to move this bill forward and pointing out the need to extend unemployment benefits for all of those people who are losing their benefits.

I also want to thank all of my colleagues who are here today. The -- the fact that there are so many of us here shows just how important this issue is, not just in our states, but across the country.

The pending bill is a great bill. It's one that will stimulate the economy. It's one that will help unemployed workers who are struggling to get back on their feet during this recession.

You know, I may be new to this body, but I'm not new to public service. And one of the things that I understand is that when people are in trouble, when they're losing a lifeline, as unemployed workers are today, that the goal should be to try and help those workers. Unfortunately, senators on the other side of the aisle have not been willing to support moving this bill forward.

Now, I know they have a right to debate amendments. They have a right to debate ACORN or any other issue they want to raise. But not today, not on this bill, and not when 7,000 people a day are getting their safety net pulled out from under them and their families.

It's disappointing that this desperately needed support for working Americans is being held hostage by politics. I urge all of those people who are holding up this legislation to do the right thing, to support passing this extension immediately.

REED:

Senator Harkin? Is Senator Harkin here (inaudible) roll call.

Senator Debbie Stabenow?

STABENOW:

Thank you, Senator Reed, Senator Shaheen, all of my friends and colleagues that are here. We have been challenged in Michigan now for a number of years. And under the previous administration, we struggled with the lack of an advanced manufacturing strategy, and we struggled continuously to get help for families that were caught as a result of having no commitment to middle-class jobs in this country.

With the new president, we've seen a wonderful change where we see him coming into office, extending unemployment benefits, and working with us on clean-energy manufacturing and other critical jobs.

But now here we are, where we need to extend those benefits an additional 20 weeks, as we work tirelessly every day to focus on jobs and turning things around for families all across the country. And what do we get? We get the same old stonewalling, the same old thing that we got when President Bush was in charge. And we are here to say: Enough is enough.

Twenty-three different states now have unemployment rates above 8.5 percent; fourteen states have unemployment rates above 10 percent. And I'm just going to run through them: Illinois, Georgia, Alabama, Florida, North Carolina, Ohio, Tennessee, Kentucky, South Carolina, California, Oregon, Rhode Island, Nevada, and Michigan. These are red states and blue states.

When someone is out of work, we're not checking their party affiliation when they need help. This is something that everybody should be coming together on. It's getting cold outside. Folks are getting ready to turn on the heat, if they haven't already, and they're going to see their costs for their families going up. We can do something about it right now, and we're standing here calling on our Republican colleagues to join us.

REED:

Senator Schumer, in the nick of time.

SCHUMER:

Well, first, I want to thank Senator Reed and Senator Shaheen, showing that Democrats -- we can get together on just about everything. Senator Reed has a high state -- high unemployment state. Senator Shaheen has a lower unemployment state. I'm sort of in the middle, but we're all together united, because if your family is unemployed, you've got 100 percent unemployment.

My question is this: Why are the Republicans holding up this bill? Don't they understand the anguish of millions of American families who need help? I was at different street fairs all across my state this weekend, and at every one, people came over to me and said, "Please." They had sad looks in their eyes. "Please extend unemployment. I don't know what I'll do. I don't know what I'll do for my children."

So why aren't we doing this? I was -- Senator Cornyn on a talk show that I was on with him said he's for it. Well, what are they holding it up for? So my message is simple. We all know how badly we need this. We all know that jobs is issue number one. Why don't the Republicans join us in one moment of bipartisanship for the sake of the unemployed?

REED:

Thanks, Chuck.
Tom Harkin?

HARKIN:

Well, thank you very much. Where's my chart? I'm not -- I'm not Senator Conrad, but I do have a chart.

SCHUMER:

Kent Conrad Harkin.

(UNKNOWN)

(OFF-MIKE)

REED:

We have plenty people to hold it, too.

(CROSSTALK)

(LAUGHTER)

HARKIN:

In fact, what Senator Schumer was saying about the different states, this just shows you that unemployment is widespread. Now, obviously, some states are hit harder than others, but almost every state has got a lot of unemployed people in their state. So this is a broad-based problem that we have, not just pertinent to one area of the country.

The second thing is, you know, we always -- we -- we want economic activity, don't we? We want to spur the economy and get things going. For every one dollar of federal money that's given out in food stamps, we get \$1.73 back in economic activity. Only second to that is unemployment benefits at \$1.63. So for every dollar we put in, we get \$1.63 of economic activity.

Infrastructure dollar, 59 -- of course, extending the Bush tax cuts, you get about 49 cents back. Or extending the alternative minimum tax, you get 31 cents back. So for the reasons of just helping, as Senator Schumer just said, people who are out of work through no fault of their own are out of work, the moral obligation we have to those families, added on to it the fact that we will get more economic activity than doing anything else argues that we should get this done right now.

Now, the Republicans are rapidly becoming the party of no. That's their choice. But on this issue, this is a fundamental moral issue of our time right now. Are we going to extend a helping hand to families who, through no fault of their own, are unemployed, who use every dollar of unemployed benefits to put food on their table, to buy heat, to buy clothes for their kids to make sure they're in school? That's what this money goes for.

And I think it's time for the Republicans to stop being the party of no and being the party of yes on this very profound moral issue.

REED:

Bob Menendez?

MENENDEZ:

Let me join my colleagues in thanking Senator Reed and Shaheen for their leadership on this issue. And it's obviously the passion we have about this, because it is a passion

reflected about what people in the country are facing in terms of challenges in their everyday lives.

You know, this unexpected battle over unemployment insurance is putting a display on the irresponsible lengths our Republican colleagues are willing to go in their strategy of no. A job-creating economic recovery package? No. Health insurance reform? No. A safety net for Americans who can't find a job for the most severe economic downturn in generations? Unbelievably, irresponsibly, they say no to this, as well.

And it seems these days that the Republican answer to everyone in our country is no, that is, unless you're a health insurance CEO or lobbyist.

We're making this stand because there's 1.5 million Americans who will have the rug pulled out from underneath them if we don't act soon. And these families cannot sustain Republicans' constant no.

They didn't ask to lose their jobs. They weren't in the Wall Street boardrooms making the decisions that created this tough employment environment. If we want to do what is right morally and if we want to keep our economy afloat while we continue to work on the job-creation engine to get it back up to full speed, then we can't cut out unemployment insurance when many families need it the most.

Make no mistake: I was in the state, my home state of New Jersey this weekend, and I heard very clearly from families that they don't want a handout. They want to get work. But when 15 million Americans are looking at 3 million jobs that are available, the numbers just don't add up.

So as we continue to create these jobs so that there will be more opportunity for them to get what they ultimately want, which is a job, we need to give them the unemployment insurance to sustain their families. The difference between having this insurance and not is the difference between barely hanging on and bankruptcy. It's the difference between paying your mortgage and losing the home to foreclosure. It's a difference between sending your children to school and having them face the challenges of being taken out of that school because you can't afford it any more.

There are real-life differences for families every day. It's a difference that we can't say no to. It's a difference that we have to say yes to. And our Republican colleagues need to get on board, especially when a whole host of their amendments have absolutely nothing, nothing to do with unemployment insurance.

CARDIN:

Well, let me thank Senator Reed and Senator Shaheen for -- for bringing us together. And Senator Stabenow listed the high- cost -- the high-unemployment areas in our country. You could have included Baltimore City, Maryland, where the unemployment rates exceed 11 percent or Dorchester County, Maryland, that exceeds 11 percent. Five counties in Maryland are above the threshold.

You could have also mentioned the fact that while the national unemployment rate is near 10 percent, for African-Americans, it's over 15 percent. For Latinos, it's almost 13 percent. So in every region of each state of this union, there are people who can't find jobs.

So I just want to thank Senator Reed and Senator Shaheen for working out an arrangement where all states can qualify for the 14 additional weeks. It's needed in every state in this nation. People cannot find jobs today. This is the right policy for our nation.

It's the right thing for those who can't find employment. And as been pointed out, it will help our economy to grow.

We've got to pass this now. There should be no obstacles put in the way to passing this bill promptly. So I urge my colleagues: Let's get the job done.

REED:

Bob Casey?

CASEY:

I want to thank Senator Reid and Senator Shaheen and our colleagues for coming together on this. If -- if you look at this from the perspective of a state like Pennsylvania, just look to the unemployment rate, which is about 8.8 percent. That's a lot lower in a relative sense than a number of states represented here on this platform, but it equates to 500,000 people out of work in our state. We have as many as 23,000 who've already run out of their unemployment benefits, and that number could -- could go, as one prediction has it going to 60,000 by the end of the year.

And for the life of me, I can't understand why, at a time of recession and misery and darkness for so many people, so many families, that Republicans in Washington -- I don't think there are Republicans around the country that support this, by the way -- but Washington, D.C., Republicans are standing in the way of providing some light, some light to that darkness, some measure of relief at a time of tremendous misery across the country.

And you -- you know we hear all the time that Washington doesn't get it, Washington doesn't respond, Washington doesn't have something specific to address certain problems. This is one instant -- instance, I should say -- where it's abundantly clear to me and clear to, I think, Americans across the board that Washington can take an action which will have an immediate effect on that misery, will provide immediate light to that darkness, and will actually, as Tom Harkin pointed out, have a pretty darn good bang for the buck at the same time.

But you have Republicans in this town that must be captivated by some interest or some point of view that doesn't allow them to -- to give us the chance to move this forward.

But I think they do that at their peril, but the -- the reason they really should be doing this is because, in every state in this country, you see there's misery. In Pennsylvania -- I'll -- I'll end with this -- we see this unemployment problem in big cities like Philadelphia, over 10 percent, 10.5 percent, roughly, in that -- in that county, that city and county.

But we also see it in very small, rural counties. In Pennsylvania, in northwestern Pennsylvania, where you see unemployment at 13 percent or 14 percent, there are very small and rural, a lot of small towns where that darkness has enveloped a lot of communities and a lot of families.

We can provide some light in that darkness, and I think Republicans in Washington should get on board and get out of the way and allow this to go forward.

REED:

Senator Klobuchar?

KLOBUCHAR:

Thank you very much. And I want to thank Senator Shaheen, Senator Reed, and everyone up here that's worked on this.

I can tell you, when the House bill came out at 8.5 percent cutoff for unemployment, I couldn't believe the letters and calls that we got to our office. And these weren't organized letters like you sometimes get, where everyone writes the exact same thing because someone e-mails them. These were actual letters from people in our state trying to explain what this meant for them.

As Marilyn from St. Paul, Minnesota, wrote, "Unemployment may be 8 percent for the state of Minnesota, but in our house, it's 100 percent." Mary Ann from White Bear Lake, Minnesota, wrote, "The tremendous stress of trying to search for an affordable job and raise two children on my own is overwhelming in itself. I cannot help that I live in one of the states with lower than 8.5 percent unemployment."

I think the understanding here is that, no matter where you live, if you don't have a job, you're in trouble. People have been searching for jobs. I think the statistic is that, for every person looking for a job or for every job that they can find, there is six unemployed workers for every actual job. We have heard from people that have sent hundreds of resumes, that have gone on 60 job interviews.

Simply put, this legislation provides relief in a fair way to all of those in need. It helps jobless workers who desperately need relief. It does not add to the deficit. And it is the right thing to do.

And that's why I am so troubled that our colleagues on the other side of the aisle are saying no to this important legislation. I don't know how they respond to the kind of letters that I'm getting. We have 13,000 unemployed in Minnesota. I don't know what they say to the people in their state when they're writing in -- the last one I'll read, Barbara from Mahtomedi, Minnesota, who writes, "My husband has been looking for a job since March. And without unemployment to help us out, I don't know what we will do. We drive old cars, bought a house within our means that we have been fixing up slowly by ourselves the past 22 years by everything used or on sale. Please don't let Minnesotans get left out in the cold." And then she notes, "It is getting really cold."

So I'm very hopeful that our colleagues on the other side of the aisle will see the light here, will respond to the thousands of constituents that I'm sure they've heard from that I've heard from. While Wall Street is raking in the money again and the Dow went up over 10,000, how can you say no to these people?

REED:

Senator Webb?

WEBB:

Thank you very much. I'd like to come here to express my appreciation to Senators Reed and Shaheen for their leadership they've shown on -- on this issue. It's a fairly basic issue. I'm sure you've -- you've heard many people before me speak about the inherent inequity when unemployment statistics are broken down statewide rather than inside different states.

And Virginia is probably a classic example of how this disparity does not take care of people who have been really suffering from this economy. Virginia is something of a

microcosm of the country demographically. People talk about Virginia as the great place to come to do business, the best state in the country to do business. You see in Northern Virginia a very highly active and high-tech economy.

But as you move to the southwest and the Southside in Virginia, we have areas that have suffered greatly with the disruption of the economy and the changes due to globalization. In Southside, Virginia, more than half of the manufacturing jobs that existed in the year 2000 are now gone. They're overseas. And the transitions in industries such as tobacco and coal have really hurt that portion of Virginia, as well.

So you can look at Virginia state by state the way that this original, well-intentioned legislation was drafted, and you'll see we got 6.5 percent unemployment. But if you look at Virginia -- I'm going to wipe some people out behind me here. I apologize for that. But if -- if you look at Virginia region by region, you can see that up here in Arlington, Loudoun, Fairfax, Northern Virginia, the employment rate is well below 5 percent.

But when you get down into Southside and southwest, which have had these problems, you have areas like Henry County where the employment -- unemployment rate is 20 percent. And the city of Martinsville, where the employment rate's 21 percent. A lot of people are saying it's now going to 25 percent unemployment.

So the darker areas indicate places in -- in the commonwealth of Virginia that are having serious and ongoing employment issues because of the turmoil of the economy and -- and the changes in our -- in our economic systems.

This type of legislation that Senators Reed and Shaheen have -- have taken the lead on will help alleviate those problems. We have 270,000 people in Virginia right now who are unemployed. Big percentage of them are down in those areas. We have 15,000 who are going to lose their benefits if we don't do something, as with this legislation in the immediate future.

So I am -- I am here to express my appreciation for the leadership of Senator -- Senator Reed, Senator Shaheen and others, and say that for our very complicated state demographically, this would be a real benefit. Thank you.

REED:

Thank you.
Senator Brown?

BROWN:

Thank you, Senator Shaheen and Senator Reed, for your leadership on this.

I -- I want to share -- briefly share a letter that I -- I received today from a woman in Cincinnati. "I've never written to my senator before, but I'd been convinced that not writing is not in my best interest. I've been unemployed for over a year. The only way I've been able to feed my family is from unemployment benefits. It seems that older Americans are at a disadvantage in the job market for a variety of reasons, including medical benefit costs. The premiums for middle-aged women are very high and have to be considered by employers that they are looking to hire. It's very discouraging. I will exhaust my current benefits by Thanksgiving. I worry about Christmas for my children, as well as how to survive the winter if this continues. Please -- please do what you can to support the extension of unemployment benefits."

We get literally dozens of letters like this every single day. We get hundreds of letters like this every single week. I'm sure my colleagues do, too. The Republicans on the

Senate floor object to extending unemployment benefits, but they won't debate. They just say no.

That's why if -- if they want to come and debate any of us, any time of day, any time of night, during the week, weekends, we'll be there. If they want to debate and share with the American people why extending unemployment benefits to workers who have paid into this insurance fund, if they want to go to the floor and debate these, these -- their reasons for objection, their reasons not for extending unemployment benefits in this terrible economy, if they want to do that, we -- we welcome them.

We want to debate this. We want them to share their reasons that they're blocking this with us and, more importantly, to share it with the American people. They simply need to stop their delaying tactics.

KAUFMAN:

This is the classic no-brainer. This is the classic no-brainer. Here we are in an economy -- I like to say this economy -- we're not at the beginning of the end. We may be at the end of the beginning.

But you don't have to have a PhD in economics to understand that in every one of these recessions, jobs lag the economy. So even though the economy may get better, it's going to be a long time before we come back with jobs. And that's why this is so important.

People are going to be out of work for a while, unfortunately. We have to do everything we can; we have tried to do everything we can. But in the meantime, we've got to take care of the people who are unemployed.

And it doesn't matter what state you're in if you're unemployed, as has been said time - time and time again here. If you're unemployed, you're unemployed no matter what state you're in, so I really want to thank Senator Reed and Shaheen and everyone for getting this bill so that every state, no matter where you are, if you're unemployed, you can get unemployment compensation. This is something that is of key value right what we're doing right now. As I said, this is a no-brainer. We should do this, and we should do this right away. Thank you.

REED:

Senator Franken?

FRANKEN:

I -- I, too, want to thank Senator Shaheen and Senator Reed for taking the lead on this. Minnesota has slipped under 8 percent, but I go home weekends. And 1,000 Minnesotans lose their benefits every week, and I meet these folks. And you can see the desperation.

People say, "I'm -- my unemployment benefits are running out. I don't know how I'm going to make my mortgage payment." We don't need more foreclosures. We -- we need to help folks. And now's the time to do it. This is the time to do it.

So we're stepping up and doing it. It's as simple as that. Ted's right. It's a no-brainer. And now we're seeing -- we're seeing banks in -- in New York giving bonuses that are, what, six times the cost of this? I mean, this just makes sense. And I get the letters, too, but when you look into someone's eyes, it doesn't matter if we've slipped under 8 percent. You just know this is the right thing to do.

REED:

Senator Kirk?

KIRK:

Thank you, Senator Reed.

Thank you, Senator Shaheen, for your leadership on -- on a very important issue.

Most of us got involved in public service because we wanted to provide hope and opportunity to our fellow citizens. The millions who have lost jobs in this recession, it becomes for them a question of human dignity and self-esteem.

When you're out of work and have to look at your children or your spouse, it's not a happy thing. They're looking to you for some way to advance that family and its opportunities. During this recession, when human dignity and self-esteem are at stake, all we are asking is provide the final vital safety net for those families so that they'd have some hope and opportunity as they look ahead to the holiday season.

Senator Shaheen and Senator Reed and I share a commonality of being from New England, where the northeaster hit this past weekend, and we had snow, and winter is on the way. That means those folks in those -- in those homes who are out of work have to make that choice again: What about heat? What about food?

These are choices on the margin. And all we are saying here is, for instance, in Massachusetts, with 9.3 percent unemployment, 15,000 of those unemployed whose benefits are now reaching the point of exhaustion, 40,000 will have been lost by the end of the year and the Christmas holidays, it's to provide some sense of dignity and hope and opportunity for these folks.

This is as easy as it should possibly be. This is not a partisan issue. This is an American issue. And we hope we can expedite the passage of this bill with the cooperation of our colleagues.

So I thank, once again, Senator Reed and Senator Shaheen, for your leadership. And thank you very much.

REED:

Thank you very much, Senator Kirk.

We'd be happy to answer any questions.

QUESTION:

Senator Reed, you talked about unrelated Republican amendments. What -- what are you referring to specifically? And could you and your fellow Democrats support the housing tax extension being added to the bill?

REED:

Well, first, there are proposals to, once again -- I think for the second, third or fourth time -- to debate the issue of ACORN. Many of us supported that amendment when it came up on one of the appropriations bills. That's clearly designed not to do anything else except slow down the process, send a political message, not send real help home to people across the country.

The proposal for the real estate extension tax is a worthy one. First of all, I think it's on the order of several billions of dollars, which I would hope we could find ways to pay for. But also, I think that's something that should be brought up, but now's not the time, if it's

going to lead to delay and further denial of extended benefits for people across the country.

So these amendments, I think, are designed more as messages to the Republican base than hope and opportunity for struggling Americans in every state. As the list that Debbie read off was states that were red, blue and in between. We've got to help everybody.

Yes, sir?

QUESTION:

Senator Reed, you guys have 60 votes. Why do you need Republicans?

REED:

We have 60 votes, but if you are -- and apparently, this is what the Republican leadership is suggesting -- if you have to have a cloture vote on a motion to proceed, if you have to have a cloture vote on the House version and then another cloture vote on the Senate version, you're talking about days and days and days of time that is not going to be spent dealing with other important issues, like the appropriations bills.

QUESTION:

(OFF-MIKE) that process (OFF-MIKE)

REED:

It could have started already. It may be. But I think -- again, I think Senator Reid approached Senator McConnell in very good faith to say, "This is critical to the country. It's critical to every state. You know, some of the states that have the worst unemployment numbers are, you know, strongly Republican. We can do this. We should do this. We will do this. We can work it out."

And there's not been the reciprocal, I think, understanding of the problem of the American people. So that might be the case, but here is one example, I think, given the universality of the issue that we could have done this, as we do so often, on a unanimous consent basis and the leadership agreeing to it.

SHAHEEN:

And -- and, listen, in past years, this has been an issue, extending unemployment benefits, that has gained bipartisan support. So there was no reason to believe the fear that the Republicans, many of whom come from states that are very high unemployment states, would hold it up. And, you know, I think the point of this press conference is to say: Look, it's time for us, for you all to get on board and help the constituents in your state, those unemployed workers who need help.

REED:

Yes, sir?

QUESTION:

(OFF-MIKE)

REED:

Well, I -- first of all, I think everything we do -- or at least to the greatest extent possible -- should be paid for. But, again, I think trying to inject another issue is -- is -- is going to complicate something that should be very direct, very obvious and immediate, which is getting these unemployment compensation benefits.

And we had the opportunity to listen to Senator Isakson (ph) this morning at the Banking Committee, and I must commend him. He did an extraordinarily thoughtful and very eloquent in his knowledge and his devotion to these issues of stimulating the real estate market.

But, frankly, I was listening to Senator Shelby, who started raising questions about whether this real estate incentive was justified by the court. And he was talking about, well, you know, people would have bought the houses anyways, et cetera.

So the notion that this proposal, paid for or aren't paid for, is simply going to fly through here, I don't think that -- from what I've heard this morning, I don't think that -- you can assume that.

We are trying to help people who are on the verge of desperation because they're running out of benefits, they have mortgages to pay, families to feed, they're desperate, they're looking for work. I think we still have the opportunity to deal with these other issues, and we will, I hope, but we've got to get this bill done.

QUESTION:

(OFF-MIKE) is that at all possible?

SHAHEEN:

I don't think we've -- we've looked at that. Our hope is that, given the challenges that are facing unemployed workers throughout this country, that we're going to -- our colleagues who have been opposing this will come around and recognize that we need to get this done and we need to get it done as soon as possible.

REED:

One more? Yes, sir, and then I'll depart.

QUESTION:

(OFF-MIKE) extension would apply (OFF-MIKE) extension for the (OFF-MIKE) those who (OFF-MIKE)

REED:

Well, I think we're trying, first, to -- for those people who are immediately at risk of losing their benefits and for those all the way up to December, which is a vast number of people, to get those people in a situation where they know they can be confident of having their -- their -- their benefits in place.

The real answer, of course, is -- is the recovery of the job market. I would think we would always hold in reserve the opportunity, the possibility to extend benefits further. But our hope is that, you know, the markets will come back and that this will be not as pressing an issue.

Jeanne?

SHAHEEN:

Again, I certainly support that. We want to start creating jobs again, and we want to help people until that time happens. So thank you all.

REED:

Thank you all very much.
CQ Transcriptions, Oct. 20, 2009

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SEN. JEANNE SHAHEEN, D-N.H.
SEN. DEBBIE STABENOW, D-MICH.
SEN. SHERROD BROWN, D-OHIO
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