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February 5, 2004

Nearly 2 Million Unemployed Americans will be Hurt by the Expiration of the Federal Unemployment Benefits Program


Dear Democratic Colleague:

We want to draw your attention to an editorial featured last week in the *New York Times* entitled "Exhausting Federal Compassion" (on reverse side). It highlights the failure of President Bush and Congressional Republicans to extend the federal unemployment benefits program to hundreds of thousands of unemployed workers who are struggling to make ends meet. As a result of the termination of the program, in the first six months of this year, nearly 2 million workers who will exhaust their regular state benefits will be barred from receiving additional benefits.

Please feel free to contact Nick Gwyn or Sonja Nesbit at x54021 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,


Charles B. Rangel


Benjamin L. Cardin

January 30, 2004

Exhausting Federal Compassion

The pernicious joblessness bedeviling the nation is spawning a new category of Americans dubbed "exhaustees": the hundreds of thousands of hard-core unemployed who have run through state and federal unemployment aid. According to the latest estimates, close to two million Americans, futilely hunting for work while scrambling for economic sustenance, will join the ranks of exhaustees in the next six months. They represent a record flood of unemployed individuals with expired benefits — the highest in 30 years — who are plainly desperate for help.

President Bush and the Republican-controlled Congress are doing nothing to help these people. Washington showed no qualms last month in allowing the expiration of the emergency federal program that had offered an extra 13 weeks of help to those who exhausted state benefits. Historically, such help has been continued in periods of continuing job shortages.

A year ago, the aid was extended an extra year by Republican leaders. But now, the G.O.P.'s election-year talk is of a recovery rooted in the tax cuts weighted for affluent America. Tending to the exhaustees clearly mars that message.

The emergency program cries out for immediate renewal. It costs \$1 billion a month, money that is available from the federal unemployment fund.

In January alone, 375,000 unemployed people are running out of state benefits with nothing to help them through to spring, according to estimates of new federal data by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a capital watchdog group. Without action, the exhaustee toll will mount.

Many will slip into the limbo of the more than 1.5 million Americans who have given up looking for work in the inert employment market. These amount to the flatliners, industrious people overlooked on the administration's screen of spiking recovery indexes.