

JOBS EFORUM REPORT



OCTOBER 2011

***THE HONORABLE GEORGE MILLER
SENIOR DEMOCRAT
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE***

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Overview

At a joint session of Congress in September 2011, President Barack Obama unveiled the American Jobs Act, legislation to get America back to work, which includes, among other provisions that fall within our Committee's jurisdiction, funding for education jobs, school repair and modernization, job training, and reemployment assistance.

On September 9, 2011, Senior Democratic Member George Miller (D-CA) [asked Chairman Kline](#) to schedule hearings on the President's proposal, including examining those issues that fall within our Committee's jurisdiction. With 14 million Americans looking for a job and millions more underemployed, time is of the essence.

However, the Committee's majority has yet to schedule action on any portion of the President's proposal.

In light of this lack of action, on September 22, 2011, Congressman Miller initiated an online jobs [eForum](#) on behalf of the House Education and the Workforce Committee Democrats to better evaluate the President's job proposal. In a video announcing the e-Forum, Miller asked Americans to write in about their first-hand experience with this economy in the areas of education work, school repair work, and long-term unemployment.

In less than two weeks, more than 700 Americans from across the country submitted their stories. While their backgrounds and stories were diverse, common patterns emerged on the wide-scale damage being caused by inaction on jobs. These stories put real voices with the general economic data.

The following report highlights excerpts from a number of the submissions, many from Americans who have solid work histories, and excellent education and training backgrounds, but who have found themselves struggling to hold onto the American Dream. These are teachers facing pink slips, recent college graduates struggling to start their careers, laid off construction workers, struggling small business owners, and others in the grips of long-term unemployment.

Without prompt action by Congress to create jobs now and remove barriers to employment, the unemployment crisis will continue for these families. The repercussions of inaction are wide-ranging, affecting children's education, families' long-term health, housing, and retirement security, and countless workers' prospects for staying in, or climbing into, the middle class that drives our nation's economic engine.

PART ONE: EDUCATION

The U.S. education system has been significantly impacted by the economic downturn. In the e-Forum, Americans told stories of how communities across this country are struggling with significant cuts in education.

Education funding from state and local governments has been hard hit by the downturn. For example, the collapse of the housing market has led to lower property tax revenue and diminished funding for local school districts.

In fact, more than 70 percent of school districts experienced funding cuts in the 2010-11 school year.¹ And although schools have been creative about utilizing their budgets — implementing half days or charging students for extracurricular activities — many have been forced to eliminate jobs for teachers and other staff.

Loss of Teachers and Education Staff

In the past two years, more than 268,000 education jobs have been lost.² These losses would have been far worse if not for funding provided via the 2009 Recovery Act and the [Jobs and Medicaid Assistance Act](#), which invested \$30 billion and \$10 billion respectively.³ With this money, school districts were able to save more than 400,000 teaching positions.⁴

But the budget crises for schools are so deep that teachers continue to face massive layoffs. The social impact of those layoffs is wide-ranging. Dawn from Novi, Michigan, discussed her frustration with being laid off while the ongoing need for teachers like her is so apparent:

“I have been teaching at-risk children for nineteen years now. I began my career in the Head Start program in Taylor, Michigan and last year was hired to teach kindergarten in the Detroit Public Schools. I am a former DPS student...I went to college and came back to Detroit to student teach. I wanted to give back to the community that helped me succeed and I was finally given that chance last fall. I had finally reached my dream of teaching kindergarten in the city of Detroit.

I now find myself unemployed, applying for food and cash assistance from the state of Michigan and probably having to cash in my retirement account to keep a roof over my head.

I am a dedicated, passionate, caring individual who CHOSE to work in Detroit. I care about the students there and meet many others who deeply love and genuinely care about

¹ Lauren Smith, “Education: Hitting the Books,” *Roll Call* (September 29, 2011)

² *Id.*

³ Executive Office of the President, “Teacher Jobs at Risk,” October 2011, http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/uploads/teacher_jobs_at_risk_report.pdf

⁴ *Id.*

the students that they teach and meet every day. I am so frustrated at the sad state of affairs in the city--I thought I could help to make a difference but instead I listen to stories of schools with 45 kindergarteners in a classroom while I sit home and collect unemployment and state assistance rather than teach a classroom of young, needy, deserving, loving children."

The remaining teachers struggle with larger class sizes and fewer supplies, as Loretta from San Francisco wrote:

"My son started elementary school at a public school 3 years ago. Every single year we have had staff layoffs, including classroom teachers and support staff. Every single year the children are not sure who will be their teacher for the next. We already have barely any support staff and only one administrator (the principal) in a school of 480 students. Additionally, classroom supplies for science, art, etc. are lacking, with many donated by parents..."

Budget cuts negatively affect the new generation of educators that our economy will undeniably rely upon, as Christi from Chicago explains:

"I chose education because when I started my tertiary education in 2000...there was a critical need for science teachers and a projected shortage for all types of teachers over the next 10-15 years. When the economy tanked, and education took a massive hit. I was a teacher (Science, 3 years). I am currently graduate (Ed.D., Curriculum) student in education. There will be no jobs for me when I graduate in May.

My brother is a teacher, and got laid off two years in a row for no reason other than being "new". Classrooms in Chicago and the suburbs are overcrowded, and often, above legal capacity. The state (IL) doesn't pay its debts to districts. There are hiring freezes, and retirements without replacements; class sizes have skyrocketed, teacher pay has been frozen or cut, benefits have disappeared, and programs were eliminated or reduced. Test scores that were already low are falling even farther.

...The situation is dismal and getting worse. Everyone (Students, Teachers, Staff) feels hopeless, helpless, and voiceless."

Teachers like Katharine, of Saint Simons Island, Georgia, are forced to abandon employment in the profession altogether, turning to other industries for basic employment – and finding even those options limited:

"I am a certified teacher who has been out of work since 6/2010. Absolutely no one is hiring. I've even gotten to the point where I apply for anything if it is full time. I was recently turned down for a job because I didn't have "convenience store experience". This is ridiculous...I have a college degree, hours toward a Masters and teaching certification, but I'm not qualified to run a lottery machine and give change. I have begged for retraining- our state, for some odd reason thinks it is a 'high need' state for teachers, so I am ineligible for learning something that would help me get a new job. Of course no one

will hire a teacher with experience when they can get a new college grad for half of what I was making...I need help. My UI is getting ready to run out entirely and I can't even get menial work. It shouldn't be this way..."

Proposed Solutions in the American Jobs Act

The President's American Jobs Act proposes funding assistance for education jobs in order to prevent up to 280,000 teacher layoffs and support the hiring of tens of thousands of more teachers. States and localities would be required to draw down this \$30 billion in education jobs funding quickly, stopping layoffs and quickly rehiring laid off teachers and other staff.

Additional Selected Education-Related Submissions

"I am a Member Coordinator with Working America in Milwaukee WI, I talk every night to people who have been affected by the jobs crisis and have seen the impact it has had on our surrounding community . . . I recently spoke with a woman named Sherry who lost her job as a full-time educator, to make ends meet she is teaching one class a day in three different schools. Each class that she teaches has more than 40 elementary or middle school students in it and she has said that she worries she is not being as effective of a teacher as possible because it is hard to hand out the individual attention each student needs. Another woman from Milwaukee, Jennifer, that I spoke to recently was laid-off from her job as a reading specialist within the Milwaukee Public School system. In a school system with so many problems she was worried about what would happen to some of the kids who did not have any help at home from parents who were working several jobs just to make ends meet. She is now volunteering several days a week at the school she used to be paid to teach at, only now she does it for free because she was so worried about the well-being and future of her students. These woman are struggling through without a job, but are still focusing on the needs of the students they taught more than they are focusing on what they will do without a job." --Carrie, Milwaukee, WI

"We have one daughter. She did well in the Rochester (NY) City Schools' School of the Arts, graduated from the University of Rochester with a honors BA in Art History in the archeology program and with minors in political science and Arabic. She worked as an archeology field technician. She heard all sorts of stories about the decline (the rapid decline is a much better description) in the performance of U.S. high school students in reading skills, mathematics, and science. She went back to school and received a cum-laude BS degree in Earth Science and Secondary Science Education with certification to teach secondary general science and earth science, and excelled in her student teaching experiences in two inner-city high schools. She has been trying to get a science teaching job for more than 18 months and is met with the same stories about teachers not retiring, schools reducing their teaching in science, and the loss of funding to hire new faculty. What do I tell my daughter, her boy friend (similar story in

Mathematics), her friends, and students with whom I interact at a major, public, research university?" -- **Fred, Rochester, NY**

"Our special needs child started high school last year. That in itself was a struggle for him. His disability makes any kind of change difficult for him...Our son was fortunate enough to have a wonderful teacher who soothed his fears (and ours). She connected with him and became a true mentor to him like he had never had before. She helped him overcome so much and we saw him blossom into a young man excited about school and life...That excitement soon turned to panic again over the summer: she had received a layoff notice. We were angry, confused, and again very fearful for our son, just at a very critical point in his academic career...This year was a make or break year, and without his special teacher to help him, we can already see the decline in his mental state. One less teacher cannot possibly balance the budget, but it can make a huge difference in the lives and futures of so many students. Stability, and the future that could give him, is all we asked for." --**Riis, Bellingham, WA**

"I have been underemployed for over two years now when the school district cut the amount of days I am allowed to work. Having very little options I was forced to file Bankruptcy this year after unsuccessfully fighting with my lender to modify my loan. I am one emergency away from being on the street. I can only count my blessings and I know many people are not as fortunate as I have been. The situation at work is so bad I am afraid if more job cuts occur that Education as an institution will never recover" --**Frank, Los Angeles, CA**

"For the last six years I had the honor to work as a vocational assessment specialist, testing disabled students to establish what jobs they could perform in the workforce. These teens had physical, mental, emotional or severe learning disabilities. I tested students from four counties, seven school districts and two states. By helping them discover their skill strengths, I helped them become employable. At the end of this last school year I was notified that due to budget constraints, my position would be cut. I loved my job, not just because my students were great, but because I knew that by doing this job I was helping these children stay off of public assistance. Yes, I'm worried about my own family and our finances but I also worry about the hundreds of students in northern Kentucky that won't be told what skills they can have that they can use to be independent taxpayers." --**Rene, Covington, KY**

"We have insufficient funding at our school(s) to adequately meet the needs of our students...All the staff is stretched thin. We are all dedicated but we all are asked to increasingly do jobs of more than one person." --**Julie, Brooklyn, NY**

"I am a cafeteria monitor at Wright Elementary School and this year we went have 29 and 31 kindergarten students in our school. This is not good because it is in a poorer neighborhood and a lot of these children need more one on one attention due to behaviorial problems and other issues from home that the over loaded techers have to deal with; therefore I feel their education will suffer because of the high class sizes due to education cutbacks. Also, due to the cut backs our children have to pay to be able to be in a sports program, cheerleading, band etc., or the arts; a first in Altoona." --Rosemarie, Altoona, PA

"My son graduated from Point Park College this past December (2010) Education Degree sum cumlade. HE has been lucky enough to have worked substitute positions in the City OF Pittsburgh school district. This new school year even though they need new teachers he was told with the funding cuts he probably will not be able to get full time work for years to come, even with all the over crowding of students in the classrooms. When we know there is a shortage of teachers..." --Mike, Pittsburgh, PA

PART TWO: LONG-TERM UNEMPLOYMENT

There has been a deepening jobs crisis in America since the economic collapse in 2009. Currently, 9.1 percent of the American workforce, or 14 million individuals, are officially counted as unemployed based on numbers of unemployment filings.⁵ Actual unemployment numbers are likely much higher as these statistics do not account for the many Americans who have become discouraged and have stopped looking for work altogether or have exhausted their unemployment benefits.⁶ For instance, an estimated one million Americans gave up and stopped looking for work in September 2011, with an additional 1.5 million Americans having not looked for work in the previous four weeks.⁷

Furthermore, the duration of unemployment has become longer, and the number of individuals facing unemployment has grown with 6.2 million of the estimated 14 million unemployed workers facing long-term unemployment, lasting six months or longer.⁸ From December 2007 to June 2011, the unemployment rate for persons unemployed for more than 99 weeks rose from 0.1% to 1.3%, with 2 million individuals considered to be very long-term unemployed.⁹

Unemployed workers are finding it increasingly difficult to find jobs due to lack of opportunities. As of July 2011, there was a deficit of more than 11 million jobs.¹⁰ Job creation has stagnated, with nearly five unemployed job seekers per each new job opening. And job creation remains weak.

To make matters worse, many of those who are fortunate to find a job opening for which they are qualified face discrimination in the hiring process based on their age and their unemployed work status.

Older Workers and Long-term Unemployment

More than 2 million Americans aged 55 or older were unemployed in August and represented 14.7 percent of the total unemployed population. More than half of older unemployed workers, or 54.9 percent, are long-term unemployed, having been out of work for 27 or more weeks. In August 2011, the average duration of unemployment for jobseekers aged 55 and over was 52.4

⁵ Sara E. Rix, "The Employment Situation, August 2011: Older Worker Unemployment Remains Stubbornly High," Fact Sheet 237, AARP Public Policy Institute, September 2011, <http://assets.aarp.org/rgcenter/ppi/econ-sec/fs237.pdf>

⁶ "Hiring Discrimination Against The Unemployed: Federal Bill Outlaws Excluding the Unemployed From Job Opportunities, as Discriminatory Ads Persist," National Employment Law Project (NELP) Briefing Paper, July 12, 2011, <http://www.nelp.org/page/-/UI/2011/unemployed.discrimination.7.12.2011.pdf?nocdn=1>

⁷ <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.nr0.htm>

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ Gerald Mayer, "The Trend in Long-Term Unemployment and Characteristics of Workers Unemployed for More than 99 Weeks" Congressional Research Service, September 12, 2011, <http://www.crs.gov/Products/R/PDF/R41559.pdf>

¹⁰ "Hiring Discrimination Against The Unemployed: Federal Bill Outlaws Excluding the Unemployed From Job Opportunities, as Discriminatory Ads Persist," National Employment Law Project (NELP) Briefing Paper, July 12, 2011, <http://www.nelp.org/page/-/UI/2011/unemployed.discrimination.7.12.2011.pdf?nocdn=1>

weeks, compared to 37.4 weeks for younger unemployed workers. For jobseekers aged 65 and over, duration of unemployment was even higher, averaging 53.2 weeks.¹¹

And, the rate of unemployed older workers is growing. The unemployment rate for older workers aged 55 and over currently remains at 6.6%, more than double the rate at the outset of the recession in December 2007 (3.2 %). Although this 6.6% unemployment rate is lower than the unemployment rate for younger workers, the number of unemployed workers aged 55 and over and the unemployment rate for this group have increased by a greater percentage as compared to any other age group.¹²

The committee received many submissions from older workers who have been unemployed more than a year. Mary Kay, a 56-year-old resident of Mantua, New Jersey, wrote about the difficulty of being unemployed for the past three years and the experience of looking for work:

"After 1861 applications, pounding the pavement, and dropping off resumes to those that still accept walk-ins, you start to get the feeling that if you made a living wage and are over 40, you might as well be put out to pasture. I have been living 1-1/2 years with no benefits, no income whatsoever and staying with a friend. I find it so hard to believe that: a) anyone thinks that minimum wage is a living wage even at 40 hours a week, and that b) after 39 years of full time work, I can suddenly be so unemployable. Anyone starting their careers in the early 70's through today cannot be considered untrainable. We went from manual typewriters, telex machines to the computer age of dumb terminals and PCs. We all learned, we all adapted, and this was long after all of us would have graduated college. We need help, we need jobs and we need employers to see that we are still can be vital to many organizations. Times constantly change as does technology, people do change with it and grow. PA/NJ offers no training for those in my situation. After three years of unemployment and no income, I cannot possibly think of taking out a loan to go back to school without a job that would pay that loan and help me contribute to the house I am lucky enough to live in, but to also help get health insurance and save a little for retirement which for me is only 12 years away."

Leigh, a Vietnam War veteran from New York City has been unemployed since being laid off due to a company merger in early January 2009 and wrote to describe the frustration of long-term unemployment:

"I have collected and exhausted all of my unemployment benefits while looking for work. I've applied for over 8,000 positions yet, even with a graduate degree, I am still unable to find any work. I also lost my health insurance and cannot afford any health care right now, even though I have serious kidney problems. I have had some computer training to enhance my skills . . . even with upgraded skills, I still cannot find work. I have two months of back rent to pay and could lose my apartment. I am likely to wind up being just another "homeless and jobless vet" even though in 2008, I had an annual salary of

¹¹ Sara E. Rix, "The Employment Situation, August 2011: Older Worker Unemployment Remains Stubbornly High," Fact Sheet 237, AARP Public Policy Institute, September 2011, <http://assets.aarp.org/rgcenter/ppi/econ-sec/fs237.pdf>

¹² *Id.*

over \$100,000. I am not looking for a handout. In fact, I am doing volunteer work just to remain sane and help others."

Gladys, a resident of Red Hook, New York wrote about her 60-year-old husband who worked in the human services field and has been unemployed for two years due to budget cuts and changes in programs:

"My husband was a hard working provider . . . His unemployment benefits have run out. Our house is in foreclosure. I am working overtime at my job just to make ends meet. We live in a rural area of New York State and the lack of jobs doesn't just affect him. I am a Medicaid Service Coordinator working with disabled individuals and their families to help them find services. Now, with the pending changes, I have to worry about my job also as New York State is planning great changes to the service for our disabled population. The lack of jobs in our area has caused many of our young people to join the armed services including my youngest son, who will be headed for Afghanistan in December. He may not come home to the house he was raised in if something does not happen soon to improve our way of life."

Don, a business development professional living in Benicia, California worked in the biotechnology field for 20 years. He wrote to describe his long job search:

"I was laid off due to a business downturn, and I have now been unemployed for 12 months. In my entire 30 year career it has not taken more than 60 days to secure a new position until now."

Bob has been a warehouse worker in Providence, Rhode Island for 25 years and has been looking for work since he was laid off in January 2009. He similarly wrote to share his story of long-term unemployment:

"I'm still looking for work today. I don't want to relocate because I have my own home, which right now is in question. I'm going on 50 yrs of age and I think that is my down fall and also keeping up with the modern times when it comes to my profession. So far, I'm still collecting UI benefits but I don't know what I will do when that runs out. I can't sell my home because no one will buy and if they do I will have to sell it at a loss..."

Hiring Discrimination on the Basis of Age

One explanation for the long-term unemployment of older workers is the influence of ongoing age discrimination in hiring. Reports of this discrimination are increasing. In 2010 alone, the Equal Opportunity Employment Commission (EEOC) received more than 23,000 charges filed under the Age Discrimination in Employment Act and related statutes. This number represents a marked increase compared to pre-recession numbers. In 2007, by comparison, just over 19,000 such charges were received by the EEOC.¹³

¹³ EEOC Enforcement and Litigation Statistics, Age Discrimination in Employment Act (includes concurrent charges with Title VII, ADA and EPA) FY 1997 - FY 2010, <http://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/statistics/enforcement/adea.cfm>

Cindy, a single parent living in San Pablo, California was laid off in 2009 by a company that was acquired during a merger and was subsequently laid off a second time after taking another job. She wrote about the reaction of job recruiters to her status as an older worker and the impact that unemployment is having on her ability to support her child's education:

"Not being young - and sometimes you can see it in the recruiter's or interviewer's eyes (even though it's illegal) is frustrating. I would take training if I could get a job that can at least pay the bills - I live frugally as a single parent, but getting a job that pays less than UI and you have more taxes just doesn't work. I'm also in the midst of trying to figure my child's college options out while on unemployment - how can you get and pay back loans if you're unemployed?"

Marleen is a 61-year-old mortgage industry specialist with 25 years of experience from West Caldwell, New Jersey, who has now been unemployed for two years. She wrote about the desperation and hopelessness that older workers feel:

"I have sent out thousands of resumes but no response to any of them . . . no one will hire me at this age . . . I have lived in my house for 39 years and I will be forced to sell if I cannot get a job very soon. I have no more savings and can't even seem to get a part time job. I see no future for me in the work place anymore and it is very hard for me to accept. I have been working since I was 14 years old and never had a problem getting a job until now . . ."

Diana is a 62-year-old resident of Lees Summit, Missouri, and has been looking for work ever since her factory closed in May of 2009. She described the difficulty of getting job interviews as an older worker:

"My house went into foreclosure. I was able to save it getting Obama's save your home loan. I am going to school to learn administrative support assistant. The full employment council is paying for my certificate. I was hoping learning some other type of skill would make me more employable. Since I ran out of unemployment in June 2011 I have had to apply for my social security . . . I did not want to draw it early because I will take such a reduction of benefits. I wanted to keep working, but have been unsuccessful. There are just too many applying for too few jobs. I know that there are age discrimination laws, but I am not even getting a call back or any interviews. I have cut everything out of my life that is not essential. After falling from middle class, having a good job and supporting three generations in my household, it is hard to accept and face where we are now."

Hiring Discrimination on the Basis of Employment Status

Unfortunately, a worker's age has not been the only source of discrimination in hiring. At a time when workers are desperate for jobs, the EEOC has received numerous reports of employers engaging in widespread discrimination against job candidates who are currently unemployed. With job listings including messages such as "No Unemployed Candidates Considered At All"

and “Must Be Currently Employed,” employers are using employment status as a proxy for work ethic and performance abilities, and are thus sending a strong message that the unemployed are not welcome.¹⁴

Some reports have suggested that workers who have been unemployed the longest are often the last to be hired, if they are rehired at all.¹⁵ A brief prepared by the National Employment Law Project (NELP) found that more than 150 ads included exclusions based on current employment status, including 125 ads identifying specific companies by name. The postings were for jobs at every skill level and of every type, from across the country.¹⁶

Participants in the e-forum reported experiencing this very sort of discrimination. Alaina was laid off from her position as a corporate recruiter in San Diego, California, in November 2009. She described her experience of being discriminated against by potential employers:

"I have had three contract jobs that lasted around 6 weeks each since I was laid off. I have been unemployed for a total of 16 months since then. I suppose if I laid people off for a living I might have a job right now. I have considered going back to school for a graduate degree but I am told that I am overqualified as it is. Overqualified?!? I have also experienced discrimination because I am unemployed. There is an erroneous perception that if people are high performers, they wouldn't be out of work. When I work as a Corporate Recruiter, hiring Managers tell me that they only want to see resumes of people who are employed. I have a BA degree and 9 years of experience and have been unable to find work. This recession seems like it is lasting years and the economy is not improving, but getting worse. We need comprehensive reform to bring our jobs back stateside."

Stephani, a resident of Concord, California, shared a similar experience:

"I have been unemployed for a little over 2yrs, I am a single parent. I exhausted my unemployment in March, so I have no source of income. I have been on several interviews however I feel that because I have been unemployed for some time now, it is being held against me. I am many months behind on my rent. I HAVE NOTHING AND NEED HELP..."

Both U.S. Reps. Rosa DeLauro and Henry Johnson, Jr. have introduced legislation to prohibit employers and employment agencies from refusing to consider job applicants solely because they are unemployed. There is some similar action taking place on the state-level. Specifically, New Jersey recently passed legislation making it illegal for employers and staffing firms to post

¹⁴ “Hiring Discrimination Against The Unemployed: Federal Bill Outlaws Excluding the Unemployed From Job Opportunities, as Discriminatory Ads Persist,” National Employment Law Project (NELP) Briefing Paper, July 12, 2011, <http://www.nelp.org/page/-/UI/2011/unemployed.discrimination.7.12.2011.pdf?nocdn=1>

¹⁵ Rix; *See also* Gerald Mayer, “The Trend in Long-Term Unemployment and Characteristics of Workers Unemployed for More than 99 Weeks” Congressional Research Service, September 12, 2011, <http://www.crs.gov/Products/R/PDF/R41559.pdf>

¹⁶ “Hiring Discrimination Against The Unemployed: Federal Bill Outlaws Excluding the Unemployed From Job Opportunities, as Discriminatory Ads Persist,” National Employment Law Project (NELP) Briefing Paper, July 12, 2011, <http://www.nelp.org/page/-/UI/2011/unemployed.discrimination.7.12.2011.pdf?nocdn=1>

such discriminatory ads, and similar legislation is pending in New York. President Obama's American Jobs Act proposal includes a ban on employers discriminating against the unemployed in hiring.

Workers Taking Part-Time Jobs and Multiple Jobs

In June 2011, nearly 2.4 million workers were employed part-time because they could not find full-time jobs. The number of persons employed part-time for economic reasons (sometimes referred to as involuntary part-time workers) rose from 8.4 million to 9.3 million in September 2011. These individuals were working part-time because their hours had been cut back or because they were unable to find a full-time job.¹⁷

Submissions to the e-forum confirm this trend. Americans looking for full-time work are taking part-time jobs, and in many cases multiple part-time jobs, to cover their bills, make their mortgage payments, and support family members. Alaina from San Diego, California took three six-week contract positions after being laid off; Allan, a graduate of California San Jose State University worked as a volunteer and was paid part time at a nonprofit from 2008 through 2011; and Helen from East Greenbrush, New York described that her 32-year-old son took three part-time jobs. Other submissions, especially those from older workers explain the difficulty of even finding part-time work.

High Unemployment Rate Among Younger Workers and College Graduates with Debt

Younger workers and recent college graduates, ages 16 through 35, have the highest unemployment rate of any age group and are finding it exceedingly difficult to secure full-time employment. Many young workers have had to postpone future plans and delay the start of their careers due to the inability to find work.

Nearly half (49.0%) of unemployed workers were under the age of 35, compared to 34.1% of employed workers.¹⁸ In August of 2011, the unemployment rate for 16-24 year old workers was 17.7%, the highest unemployment rate among any age group. Many of these younger workers are unable to find work after significant job search efforts and as a result are having great difficulty paying of their student loans.

Allan, a graduate of California San Jose State University, wrote about his struggle to find full-time paid work since graduating from college in 2005:

"I have been struggling to find a full-time job . . . From 2008 to 2011, I worked as a volunteer and was paid part-time at a nonprofit. I am part of the 25-34 year old group still living with their parents. I have been applying for jobs in data entry the last couple

¹⁷ "Employment Situation Summary," Bureau of Labor Statistics, October 7, 2011, <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.nr0.htm>

¹⁸ Gerald Mayer, "The Trend in Long-Term Unemployment and Characteristics of Workers Unemployed for More than 99 Weeks" Congressional Research Service, September 12, 2011, <http://www.crs.gov/Products/R/PDF/R41559.pdf>

of years, and as an office and admin assistant. I haven't received any responses to interview except for one job. They won't hire me because I don't have enough work experience, but how I am supposed to get work experience if they don't hire me?"

Helen, a married mother from East Greenbrush, New York, described her concern about her children and their difficulties securing full-time employment:

"My husband and I have been married for 42 years and we have two grown children who followed our advice and went on to complete higher education. They are both under employed and our youngest child, despite having a masters degree in public policy and 7 years direct experience in child welfare, has been unable to secure full time employment...He has \$80,000 in education debt and no way to even begin to repay it. He had hoped to work for a non-profit agency and have some of this loan forgiven after 10 years of service. We are helping him to survive this difficult time but even with up to 3 part time jobs which are unpredictable in terms of hours and income, he is not able to support himself at age 32. I know he feels demoralized and despite constant applications and his share of interviews, the competition is simply eroding his sense of confidence and destroying any future security. We are trying to help but have both retired and are now working part time jobs. Despite years of planning and saving, I don't know how to advise our children and frankly, they don't want our advice anymore."

In the current economy, more and more degree earners are encountering a bleak job market when leaving university with a large debt to boot, as Elizabeth from Woodbridge, Virginia explained:

"I can't get a job. No matter what I've been doing I can't find a job. It makes no sense because I am a college graduate, [have a] decent portfolio, [and] can use Adobe products...I've been shortchanged because they check my credit rather than my credentials. Yes, I'm a graduate. Yes, I went into debt to better myself for the future...but does that mean I should be cast out because I got 150k in debt for my education? Should I be treated as a leper because I wanted to become something better; and then the market collapsed?"

Sarah from Washington, D.C., explained how she has had to abandon the profession for which she attended school, and for which she went into debt, in order to pay her bills:

"I am 32 years old and part of the growing population called the "educated poor". I am a college and law school graduate. After I graduated law school and took the bar in 2008, I could not find a legal position. I opted to go back to my old career, fundraising for a nonprofit. I am still here today-- grossly underemployed and barely making ends meet on my salary. I owe close to \$200,000 in student loan debt and when all is paid at the end of the month, I am left with \$100.00 in my pocket (before buying food or gas). I am not a consumer by any stretch of the imagination. I can't buy a house, a new car, or even think about ever having children. It's a depressing place to be and I wait for the day someone steps up and either figures out this job crisis or forgives our student debt. Until then, I suffer."

Louisa from Oakland, California, had a similar story:

"...I borrowed tens of thousands of dollars in student loans, just to find my degree useless amongst the masses of overqualified unemployed seeking work. After working a dozen dead end jobs, I was accepted into the IBEW apprenticeship program in Alameda County, CA. I can finally start making payments on those repressive student loans!"

Proposed Solutions in the American Jobs Act

The President's American Jobs Act proposes to tackle the problem of long-term unemployment and underemployment in a number of ways, some of which are within this Committee's jurisdiction. It includes a new "Pathways Back to Work Fund," which aims to give low-income youth and adults greater access to work and training opportunities through summer and year-round jobs for youth, subsidized employment, and support for innovative job training programs, including at community colleges. The youth programs supported 370,000 jobs and a similar subsidized employment program supported 260,000 jobs in 2009 and 2010. It also includes measures to improve reemployment assistance and promotes work-share options intended to save the jobs of workers who would otherwise be laid off. The proposal provides for a ban on hiring discrimination against workers based on their unemployed status.

The proposal includes other measures outside the Committee's immediate jurisdiction to assist the unemployed, including a critical extension of unemployment insurance to prevent six million people from losing benefits.

Additional Selected Long-Term Unemployment-Related Submissions

"I am a 3rd Generation Sheet Metal Worker in the Philadelphia, New Jersey, Delaware area and this my story. I started my apprenticeship in 1988 and attended school for 4 years where I learned the trade of Sheet Metal Worker. I had worked pretty steady during my 20 plus years up until July 5, 2010 that was my last day of employment. I am a very skilled and educated worker with many years left to help build this great nation...I am on my 2nd tier of unemployment and at 44 years old with 2 sons in school and near college age what do I say to them. What American Dream!!" --William, Sicklerville, NJ

"I am an Ivy League graduate who worked for AT&T and its spinoff, Lucent Technologies, for 27 years. When the tech bubble collapsed 10 years ago, not only did my job disappear, but most of the comparable jobs in similar companies vanished. I have marketing and technical skills, experience in overseas markets, managerial experience and I cannot find work. People my age are not even getting interviews for the few real jobs on the market. I am struggling to start over in an entry-level commission-only sales job, at a time when I should have been in my peak earning years. While I may be luckier than some, the jobs issue is much broader and deeper than construction, education, or job training." --C.C., Rockaway, NJ

"The legislation to extend unemployment benefits for the "99ers"--people who have exhausted all unemployment benefits did not pass so I am in crisis mode and feels like NO one cares. In Virginia, we get about 85 weeks of unemployment. I have not gotten anything since October 2010. Subsidized COBRA ended for me in May 2010, so I have had no health insurance since that month, either. I am a single woman, and since January 2009 am hitting brick walls looking for employment. I volunteer at several places, network constantly, and for the last two years have spent eight hours minimum per day looking for employment. The construction, housing, and architectural industries have been hit especially hard and need special help. Under a different climate, I am a very desirable and sought-after seasoned architectural design professional, but these days jobs are scarce to nil. I had to move in with family 18 months ago and have been bouncing around among family members living in Spotsylvania, Richmond, and Glen Allen..." --
Richa, Spotsylvania, VA

"I worked at a manufacturing company for 16 years, and would possibly have retired from there had it lasted until my retirement age. Unfortunately, it did not. In fact, the division I worked at was not closed due to being deficient, but because we were among the last profitable business units in the company. Our parent company was in debt to the banks, and then the market and economy tanked. They were forced to sell off all assets. That meant our division. All the good people at my division worked tirelessly to make it lean and tight. Our reward was being sold to our competition. Our facility was dismantled, all personnel were laid off, and I had the agonizing task of helping disassemble some of the same systems I'd helped to grow and maintain over the years. It's been a struggle ever since. I am currently enrolled in the Eastbay Works program in an attempt to reinvent myself, or at least find meaningful employment. Since my last days at that company in 2005, I've attempted to work for myself in various capacities, and for other companies. I have yet to find a compatible match. Fortunately, I am a veteran, and am in the VA medical system. So, I can utilize that benefit should the need arise. I do worry about keeping my home, paying my mortgage, keeping my car running, and such. With my retirement savings dwindling, the future is uncertain..." --
Tom, Hercules, CA

"My job went to China in 2006. I tried to go back to college for a higher degree but halfway through lost my funding. I had no way to pay for a higher degree. So since 2008 I've been working at minimum wage and dipping into my savings to exist. My savings are now gone. I have to look at using my retirement to live on..." --
Denise, Williamsburg, CO

"I was working for GE making filaments for lightbulbs. My plant closed because the jobs were sent out of the country. That was almost 3 years ago. I'm in retraining now, but being over age 50 (53 to be exact), I know my job prospects are extremely limited. We've gotten behind on all of our bills and we have had no insurance, because even if I were still eligible for COBRA, it's cost prohibitive..." --
Donald, Youngstown, OH

“I am terrified that I will freeze to death, homeless, in December or January. I am a 59 year old woman with a Master’s degree and 15+ years of related experience. I lost my job in January 2009. I have been paying the 30-year mortgage on my house for over 20 years. I’ve been looking for work since January 2009. I also attend school...

“Vocational Rehabilitation helped me to enroll in a Community College and paid for my books and tuition—even though I’m not sure if I am able to work. I obtained a certificate (3.96 GPA), then applied for work. I had 10-12 interviews last year, but no offers, so I decided to complete the AAS degree. I was assigned a disability advocate to help me prepare for interviews and look for work. I applied for 50+ jobs, but I had no interviews since the government shutdown. My student loan and work study are paying for this last semester. I have no other source of income...” --Genevieve, Rochester, MN

PART THREE: CONSTRUCTION

Construction work has long-supplied decent middle class jobs for millions of Americans. Since the economic and housing collapse beginning December 2007, more than 1.9 million construction jobs have been lost. The national unemployment rate for construction workers stood at 13.3 percent in September 2011.¹⁹

Despite the lack of construction employment, the need to repair and modernize schools and other infrastructure is greater than ever. Yet without funding, many projects are delayed or cancelled.

Need to Modernize Educational Infrastructure

In a study of the nation's public school infrastructure, the National Center for Education Statistics found that at least 30 percent of schools complain that environmental factors interfere with classroom instruction.²⁰ In schools where 75 percent or more of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch and where portable (temporary) buildings are in use, 20 percent complain that the physical condition of buildings interferes with instruction.²¹ Nationwide, 70 percent of public schools have portable (temporary) buildings and/or classrooms.²²

Sara from Sebastopol, California, said that the need for school repair work has been long-evident:

"Throughout my teaching career I worked in buildings where we placed pails to catch the rain water coming through the roof and in 'temporary' bungalows with no insulation. I remember standing in line in the basement to obtain 2 pieces of chalk and a 1/2 inch worth of paper for my poverty stricken students each day. For a while, class size did go down, but it's back up again. This lack of actually paying for what we should be doing is a long story, not a new story."

Angelica from Richmond, California, noted similar problems with one of her local schools.

"Part of my family lives on 42nd. St. across Wilson School in Richmond, California. The school is pretty old and in need of repair. I have seen in a couple of occasions rats crossing the street from the buildings where a preschool and a day care center operates. I am pretty sure they are also present in the primary school area."

"My main concern is the street which is full of holes. I have called the City of Richmond several times and for many years to report how dangerous the holes in a street where a

¹⁹ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Industries at a Glance, Construction: NAICS 23. <http://www.bls.gov/iag/tgs/iag23.htm>

²⁰ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Fast Response Survey System (FRSS), "Public School Principals' Perceptions of Their School Facilities: Fall 2005," FRSS 88, 2005, and unpublished tabulations. http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d10/tables/dt10_106.asp

²¹ *Id.*

²² *Id.*

primary school is located. Car(s) go around the holes, which could cause an accident any time...”

The repair of school infrastructure represents a clear solution to two problems: It would be a long-term investment in upgraded learning environments and create construction jobs that may put someone like Rob from Walled Lake, Michigan, back to work in a decent middle class job:

“I am a long time union construction laborer who has been out of work for almost three years. I have spent most of the money I worked hard to save for retirement in order to get by...Meanwhile, the roads and bridges are in terrible shape, the electrical grid and the water and sewage systems are antiquated and there are many schools in need of repair.”

Even while school infrastructure deteriorates, school enrollment is increasing, underscoring the need to act now. From 2008-2009 through 2020–2021, public elementary and secondary school enrollment is projected to increase from 49.3 to 52.7 million students.²³

Proposed Solutions in the American Jobs Act

The American Jobs Act proposes to put hundreds of thousands of construction workers back to work by, among other things, modernizing and supporting new science labs, internet-ready classrooms and school renovation in at least 35,000 public schools across the country. The investment would amount to \$25 billion in construction-related school repair and modernization work, with an additional \$5 billion to repair and upgrade community colleges.

In addition, beyond this Committee’s jurisdiction, the proposal includes immediate investments in other needed infrastructure projects to improve our nation’s roads, railways and airports.

Additional Selected Construction-Related Submissions

"I'm a civil engineer. I lost my job in the municipal sector due to state aid cutbacks. In the public and private sector, the lack of infrastructure funding -- bridges, roads, water, stormwater and wastewater systems -- is both contributing to the crippling deterioration of those 'systems that allow for civilized living' (Henry Petrokowski, civil engineer); and also preventing the utilization of advanced skills of the nation's engineering talent..." -- Joan, Somerville, MA

"My son is an operating engineer and has not been called to work for two years while our streets and roads are getting dangerous with all the cracks and holes. Isn't it time we put America back to work?" --Michaeline, Crest Hill, IL

²³ Aud, Susan, et al. “The Condition of Education 2011,” National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education. May 2011 <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2011/2011033.pdf>

"For 25 years I've been doing one thing or another in the construction trades, carpentry, glazing, drywall and whatever else needed to be done. I've spent the better part of my career working non-union, but I became a union member when I had the opportunity. Everywhere I go I see roads, bridges, buildings both public and private crumbling..." --Bruce, Derry, NH

"I've worked for building materials suppliers for over 7 years. Before that I worked in construction. I was laid off in December 2010 and have not found work since. My wife is self employed and all our insurance was through my work. We have not been able to afford any insurance since I was laid off. We are both 60 years old. We are struggling to keep our home and pay our property and income taxes. I'm now enrolled full time in a college nursing program through a local college but my unemployment compensation will run out soon and I have no idea what will happen then. Luckily we are both in good health right now. It would really help if my unemployment compensation could be extended and we could get a big break on our taxes. Then I could finish the college work and get a job in nursing." --Mike, Rockland, ME

"...one of the critical challenges we and other community colleges across the nation face is that we are trying to educate and prepare the workforce for 21st century jobs, using 20th century facilities and infrastructure...Unfortunately, the traditional sources of funding we have relied upon are drying up as a result of our struggling economy, placing future improvements and job opportunities in danger...Our District is estimating we need approximately \$325 million over the next 3-8 years to continue the capital improvements program. In the meantime, projects planned in the immediate future are already stagnating due to lack of funding. Here are a few projects that are ready to go but unfortunately do not have the funding to complete..." --Capital Improvements Program Manager, Contra Costa Community College, Martinez, CA

"My name is Salvador and I am a union carpenter from Chicago who has been laid off for about two and half years. I have been trying to find any type of construction work but there isn't any. My unemployment benefits finish in December 2010 and my house has been in foreclosure. Thank god my family helped out. My truck is close to being repossessed, I can't pay my bills, and all my savings is gone because there isn't any work out there. I see a lot of construction that could be done and must be done: bridges, roads, and infrastructure. All we are asking for is a chance to work. Bring America back to work - we all need it now and for our future. So give us the funding to get a lot of people back to work. NO WORK, NO FUTURE." --Salvador, Chicago, IL

"...My husband works as a union concrete laborer, as two companies shut their doors without warning, we lost it all, that is everything we built over a twelve year marriage with two kids. My kids watched as we sold their play set and toys to have enough to make it, so we moved into an apartment and regrouped. My husband was a hard worker and thankfully his work ethic has produced him work from former employers, although neither one of those employers can produce year round work, they are both working hard to find construction work for their employees, but there are not many projects funded, but MANY NEEDED. All of my husband's co-workers who have for years, worked hard to provide for their families, are losing the grip they have on their homes, and their lives. We have been doing our best to provide for the destitute, and those people are our friends and neighbors..." --Tanya, Lake Geneva, WI

"I have been working since I was 14 years old, from cutting grass in the summer to shoveling snow in the winter. I have never claimed unemployment until I was 41 years old , now I find myself out of work for almost two years. I am a union electrician LU 357 out of Las Vegas and I last worked on January 8, 2010. What happened to me happened to a lot of construction workers across America, at no fault of our own. A bunch of unemployed Americans now find themselves at the end of their unemployment benefits..." -- Brian, Henderson, NV

"I have been out of work for over two years with a few temp jobs in that period. I am 61 years old in great shape but the demand in the construction industry has been so low that nobody is hiring. Meanwhile our bridges and public buildings are falling apart..." --Thomas, Feasterville, PA

"I am a licensed plastering and masonry contractor in CA, and I operate in the San Francisco Bay Area. The last two years have been very difficult. The reasons for this are many; bidding against non-licensed people, contractors who have dropped their liability and workers comp insurance and moved to a cash system, the high costs of fuel, energy, food, water, education, health care, and the unavailability of credit to those wanting to update the space they're in.

"Currently we operate on an average of 25-30 hours a week which has cut into my employees ability to provide for their families. It seems they have an ever increasing share of their income going to the necessities for life, rent, and food, which means there is less left over for those quality of life things that we take for granted when the economy was better." --Jon, Vacaville, CA

"I am a small General Contractor in Concord CA. I currently have 5 employees, but the lack of work available makes it very difficult to keep everyone busy. I have scratched and clawed the little work that I have had recently only to run out of work again and i have to tell my guys to

stay home. I am taking a smaller and smaller cut of the work when i have it to keep my talented employees, but I can not continue to sustain such low margins or take losses because there is so much competition from out of work tradesman Many are trying to work under the table to feed their families. As a licensed GC with Workers Comp costs and regular payroll taxes and insurance It is hard to compete with the guys that are willing to work for cash. I am not saying I need lower taxes! I want people back to work so they can afford construction, home improvement projects to put us all back to work....” --Patrick, Concord, CA