

FIGHTING FOR UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION

September 2009

On August 24, the fund that Florida uses to pay unemployment benefits officially ran dry, a victim of the recession and the highest unemployment levels in three decades.

Today, thousands of workers have already exhausted their benefits. And what's worse, the numbers of laid off workers no longer eligible for unemployment insurance payments could soar in the remainder of the year.

Florida House Democrats fought to extend a helping hand

to those who lost their jobs due to the economic downturn. Using \$2 billion in federal economic stimulus approved by Congress and President Obama, the Legislature extended the length of time that unemployed workers receive assistance and increased the weekly benefit.

Still, we could have easily done even more for our workers --- and Florida House Democrats argued for doing so. Unfortunately, House Republican leaders voted along party lines to refuse a House Democratic-sponsored proposal that would have helped Florida obtain approximately \$444 million in additional economic

recovery monies for the state's Unemployment Compensation Trust Fund.

Those additional monies that Florida House Democrats asked to be used for our unemployment benefits remain needed for desperate job seekers.

In late-April, a House Democratic proposal was presented by state Representative Kevin J.G. Rader (D-Delray Beach). During floor debate,

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Rep. Adam Fetterman, D-Port St. Lucie

numerous Democrats spoke in favor of and voted in support of the proposal. State Representative Adam Fetterman

(D-Port St. Lucie) was among them.

"We are playing politics with the lives of people back home. If you have people back home who are struggling to make ends meet, then you have to support this," said Representative Fetterman. "These dollars will help people to stay alive, to stay in their homes, and will provide food for their families."

Rep. Scott Randolph, (D-Orlando) also warned during the same debate that refusing to use the additional available federal stimulus funds could result in workers losing their ability to stay in their homes because of the

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threat of foreclosures due to income loss.

Florida is now borrowing money from the federal government, under emergency legislative authority, to keep nearly a half a million unemployed Floridians receiving an average of \$240 a week for up to 26 weeks. In September alone, the state is expected to borrow at least \$300 million to pay benefits.

Of course, Florida is not alone. Aid to the unemployed is running out throughout the nation. But our situation, with a jobless rate in August of 10.7 percent, is particularly cruel. That's because Florida pays its unemployed about \$60 less each week than the national average. The state also has stricter eligibility rules than most states, which results in only one of every three unemployed persons qualifying for benefits.

Florida House Democrats have said that unemployment benefits provide more than compassion and vital assistance to individuals and their families. Extending these benefits can also be a quick fiscal stimulus. Economists have said that when people exhaust unemployment and health insurance, many end up applying for disability benefits, which become an even costlier drain on government treasuries. Extending

unemployment benefits reduces the widespread woes of unemployment.

On behalf of the Florida House Democrat Caucus, thank you for visiting www.flhousedems.com. Please feel welcome to return to this site regularly for more information about happenings in the Florida Legislature.

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