



COALITION ON HUMAN NEEDS

1120 Connecticut Avenue, NW · Suite 910 · Washington, DC 20036

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Congress is Leaving With Urgent Business Unfinished

Statement by Deborah Weinstein, Executive Director, Coalition on Human Needs

Congress appears about to leave without having acted on urgently needed legislation to reduce the impact of the faltering economy on millions of Americans. Economists on every side of the political spectrum have advised that recovery requires strategies such as more unemployment benefits, Food Stamps, and aid to states to prevent cuts in Medicaid and child support – all effective because they provide income to families who will spend it quickly, prevent loss of jobs and services, and therefore boost the economy.

Now the downturn is worse, to a significant extent because of the credit woes inflicted by Wall Street on the rest of us. There is as yet no adequate response either from the Bush Administration or Congress to protect millions of people from serious hardship and to build towards economic recovery. It is particularly shocking that efforts to extend unemployment insurance have been blocked, despite the fact that 800,000 people will exhaust their benefits this Sunday, with a total of about 1.1 million running out of benefits by the end of December. We are similarly concerned that the bailout legislation passed by the Senate does not have adequate protections for homeowners to avoid foreclosure.

Members of the Coalition on Human Needs include service providers, faith-based organizations, policy experts and other advocates of low-income people. They are seeing increasing lines for emergency food, with dwindling supplies. A temporary increase in Food Stamps would help more than 28 million people with skyrocketing food costs. Sixteen states plus the District of Columbia had unemployment rates of 6.5 percent or higher in August; last week the number of jobless claims rose to 497,000, the highest since 2001. Twenty-two states have started to cut services for nursing home residents, children in school, families owed child support, college students, and many others. Failure to address these problems will make the recession worse.

Because Congress' job is not done, we call upon our Senators and Representatives to act – if not this week, then in November.

For more information, contact Deborah Weinstein, dweinstein@chn.org; (202) 223-2532 x111