

Mayor Rybak calls for extension of jobless benefits for Minnesotans

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Standing with people trying to get back on their feet and find work, Minneapolis Mayor R.T. Rybak last week called on Congress to quickly extend federal unemployment benefits for Minnesotans. Unless action is taken soon, thousands of Minnesotans without jobs will lose unemployment benefits by the end of the year.

“Too many people in Minneapolis and across Minnesota need more time and help to find a job,” Mayor Rybak said. “Thanks in part to federal stimulus funding, our WorkForce Centers are doing an excellent job helping record numbers of people get back to work, but thousands will soon lose benefits if Congress does not act quickly to extend these jobless benefits.”

A bill recently approved by the U.S. House of Representatives would extend unemployment benefits by 13 weeks, but only for states with at least 8.5 percent unemployment for three consecutive months, or 6 percent for 13 months. Currently, Minnesota, with an unemployment rate of less than 8 percent, would not qualify for help under this bill. Mayor Rybak thanked Minnesota’s U.S. Senators Amy Klobuchar and Al Franken for already working on legislation to extend benefits for all states.

“We thank Congress and President Obama for passing the federal economic Recovery Act, which not only has helped us create 600 new jobs in Minneapolis, but has helped an additional 450 people get the training they need to get back to work,” Rybak said. “But the loss of these jobless benefits would simply create more economic hardship. We thank Senators Klobuchar and Franken for working to give people who need it a little more time and a little more help to find a job.”

Rybak called for the benefits extension while visiting a WorkForce Center in south Minneapolis, where more than 24,000 people have been helped over the last six months to find work. The Minneapolis WorkForce Centers have also graduated 1,000 people through their innovative and unique two-week “Employment Ready U” workshops that help people update the skills they need to get a job, and provide peer support and motivation to get back to work.

Minneapolis WorkForce Centers serve the most people of any in the state, nearly 60,000 last year alone, and the numbers increase every month. The number of employment workshops held in Minneapolis WorkForce Centers last year increased 75 percent compared to the year before, from 2,155 to 3,775 workshops.

“We are doing everything we can to create jobs, grow businesses, and get people the skills they need to get back to work,” Rybak added. “But turning this economy around will take time and people need some kind of a safety net until the economy fully recovers.”