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Secretary Gassman, State Labor Department Leaders from Across Nation Urge Congress to Extend Benefits for Unemployed

Over 9,000 Wisconsin unemployed in final weeks of benefits

NIAGARA FALLS, N.Y. – Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development (DWD) Secretary Roberta Gassman and her counterparts from states across the nation today urged Congress to approve emergency legislation that would extend unemployment insurance for individuals about to exhaust their benefits.

“Our unemployed workers and their families are struggling to survive,” Secretary Gassman said. “We are united in our call for action: Congress must provide relief for those who are running out of unemployment benefits.”

Governor Jim Doyle and 21 other governors recently sent leaders of Congress an urgent letter requesting an additional 13 weeks of benefits. They said the steps Congress took earlier this year to extend benefits and turn the economy around served to stabilize the economy. However, additional relief is needed, they said.

“Given the severity and length of this economic crisis, unless Congress acts, we expect that more than 400,000 workers nationwide will exhaust their federal extended benefits by September with exhaustion rates expected to increase over the coming months,” the governors said in their Sept. 15th letter.

Secretary Gassman said a little over 9,000 Wisconsin individuals are in the final weeks of their benefits. The state is paying approximately 200,000 claims per week to individuals who are unemployed through no fault of their own. Wisconsin has seen record claims resulting from the national recession. She said the state is currently administering five benefit programs providing state and federal benefits for up to 79 weeks.

Secretary Gassman and other state labor department leaders spoke at a news conference as Congress was poised to act on legislation authorizing 13 weeks of federal extended benefits. The House of Representatives unanimously approved the measure on Tuesday. The emergency legislation now awaits Senate action.

Joining Secretary Gassman and her counterparts at the news conference were New York unemployed workers who are about to exhaust their benefits. During her remarks, Secretary Gassman noted Wisconsin was the first state to enact an unemployment insurance compensation law, one of the reforms resulting from the Great Depression.

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Secretary Gassman is a board member of the National Association of State Workforce Agencies, which is holding its annual conference in Niagara Falls. She is Vice Chair of NASWA's Employment and Training Committee and an Audit Committee member.

States taking part in the news conference included Arizona, Iowa, Kansas, New York, Maine, Montana, Oregon and Washington.

The weekly benefit in Wisconsin ranges from a minimum \$54 to a maximum of \$388. The average benefit check is \$240 per week.