

Durbin wants benefits extended

Senator visits employment center in North Aurora

By MARK FOSTER
Kane County Chronicle

NORTH AURORA — U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin wants to reinstate the 13-week federal unemployment benefits extension.

Durbin, D-Ill., on Thursday visited the Illinois Employment and

Training Center in North Aurora, where he met with job-training officials and Kane County residents in search of work.

Workers who are laid off receive 26 weeks of unemployment benefits. Federal legislation that provided a 13-week extension to 39 weeks expired Dec. 21.

"Cutting off those benefits at Christmas was as much of a humbug as Ebenezer Scrooge," Durbin said.

The end of the extension affects 19,000 Illinoisans, Durbin said. That number will increase to 97,000 by June if Congress does not act.

Durbin said that despite Presi-

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• Charles Dodson of Geneva, a former business executive, is one of many people in Kane County who has struggled to find work.

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dent Bush's assertions that the economy is recovering, there now are 357,000 fewer jobs in the state since the temporary federal unemployment benefits extension program was initiated in March 2002.

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Kane County Chronicle

No. 1 selling daily newspaper in central Kane County

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Vol. 14 Issue 140

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Durbin

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"This isn't a recovery," Durbin said. "It's a jobless recovery."

Durbin indicated that the benefits extension issue has become partisan.

"The White House and the congressional leaders didn't want to extend it," Durbin said. "The leaders in the other party don't want to concede the unemployment problem."

Durbin said there also appears to be another reason for the congressional failure to extend the benefits.

"There seems to be this mistaken notion that if you extend the benefits for 13 weeks that people will stop looking for work," Durbin said. "More than 400,000 Illinoisans remain unemployed, and it's not for lack of

looking for a new job."

However, Durbin said 300,000 unemployed American workers have indeed given up looking for a job recently, and that this accounts for the fall in the unemployment rate to 5.9 percent in the most recent jobs report.

If unemployed workers who have dropped out of the job hunt were included, the rate would be 7.1 percent, Durbin said.

Only unemployed workers who established a claim for the extension on or before Dec. 21 are receiving the additional 13 weeks in benefits, said Sue Bradley, regional manager for the Illinois Department of Employment Security.

"We support the federal grant extension," Bradley said.

Durbin said that beyond the benefits extension, the federal government must encour-

age the revitalization of the economy's manufacturing sector.

"The question is how can we turn this jobless recovery into something that puts people back to work," Durbin said. "We need to provide decent jobs for people to raise their families."

Low currency valuations in nations like Mexico and China, along with countries like Russia that are illegally exporting steel to America at a cost lower than what it cost to produce, are sending manufacturing jobs overseas, Durbin said.

Durbin also is advocating a new look at how workers are supplied with health insurance coverage.

"We need to get away from company-based coverage because it becomes embedded in the cost of products," Durbin said.