

**U.S. Sen Dick Durbin speaks to business representatives and unemployed area residents at the State Employment and Training Center in North Aurora Thursday morning.**

# Sen. Durbin meets with Fox Valley residents, calls for action on benefits

**By Jan Ramming**

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**NORTH AURORA** — One year ago, Jim Flurry lost his job as vice president of operations for Hansen Technologies of Chicago.

The 48-year-old, who remains unemployed, said he has more than 30 years of experience in various levels of manufacturing.

Finding a job, Flurry said, comes down to "finding the opportunity — there's just not a lot out there."

Flurry was one of several people who met with U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., Thursday at the Illinois Employment and Training Center in North Aurora. Durbin is calling for Congress to reinstate federal unemployment benefits.

"We fought this fight just last year, demanding recognition from the Republicans in Congress and the Bush Administration — that we're faced with a tough economy and unemployed workers rely on these benefits just to stay afloat," Durbin said.

Congress has not renewed the special federal unemployment compensation program for workers who have exhausted their 26 weeks of regular unemployment bene-



**Charles Dodson of Geneva talks to Sen. Durbin about his experiences in trying to find employment after losing his job.**

fits. The program, which extends compensation an additional 13 weeks, expired on Dec. 21.

"Cutting off these benefits right before Christmas was an Ebenezer Scrooge thing to do," Durbin said.

In Illinois, about 28 percent of all unemployment benefit claimants have exhausted all the benefits they qualify for, according to Bern Collieran of the Illinois Department of Employment Security.

"That translates to 3,700 people per week in Illinois who are exhausting their benefits and will not get additional benefits beyond their six months without the extension that the senator is asking for," Collieran said, "and that extension is just for three months."

Durbin said that nearly 19,000 Illinois residents are in a "state of emergency" this month because the federal benefits they were counting on were cut off. That number will swell to nearly 97,000 by June, 2004, if Congress does not take action to reinstate the benefits.

"This jobless recovery has hit Illinois harder than most states," Durbin said. "The 400,000 families facing unemployment need our help."

It would cost less than \$1 billion per month to extend the federal program, he said.

For Flurry, the \$340 per week unemployment benefit he was receiving helped cover his \$900 monthly medical insurance bill.

"I've been in the work force 30 years," Flurry said, "and, then, after 39 weeks, my benefits ended. Why? I've been paying into it for years. Why should they run out while I'm still unemployed?"