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UNEMPLOYMENT BACKLOG MAY NOT BE CLEARED UNTIL OCTOBER

MADISON – While testifying today before the Senate Committee on Labor and Regulatory Reform, the Department of Workforce Development (DWD) stated that the current backlog of unemployment claims likely wouldn't be cleared until August and possibly as late as October. That was just one of the troubling details highlighted during the committee hearing.

"I appreciate Secretary Caleb Frostman and the other experts testifying today about the problems in the unemployment system," said Senator Van Wanggaard (R-Racine). "The information we received was at times sobering and completely unacceptable, but it's important that the information be publicized."

Besides the unemployment claim backlog lasting for another 3-5 months, other discoveries at the committee hearing included:

- The Department of Workforce Development unapologetic refusal to expand call center hours beyond 7am to 5pm
- An apparent complete lack of communication between Governor Evers' office and the Department of Workforce Development;
- The Department of Workforce Development doing virtually nothing to prepare for the inevitable rise in unemployment benefits prior to Governor Evers' "Safer-at-Home" order, and reacting slowly to add staffing capabilities;
- The Department of Workforce Development stating they didn't begin programming to administer the supplemental 13-weeks of unemployment payment prior to a couple of days ago;

"I've been saying it for weeks. People need help now. Not weeks or months from now. They need it today, now," said Wanggaard. "Not clearing the unemployment backlog until August or October is completely unacceptable. How is anyone supposed to last that long without any income?"

"I don't blame the Department for being overwhelmed. The influx of claims is a situation that few could have handled regardless of resources," Wanggaard continued. "But there comes a point when you need to make progress, and need to stem the tide. I'm glad that DWD will be adding staff, adjudicators and call centers to help with the situation in the next couple of weeks. But this is like the little Dutch boy putting a finger in the dam after the town has flooded."

At the beginning of today's hearing, Chairman Steve Nass (R-Whitewater) announced that there will likely be additional hearings on the unemployment insurance program in the coming weeks and months. Wanggaard serves as the vice-chair of the committee.

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