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Sen. Smith Introduces Legislation to Help Republicans Solve Unemployment Crisis

MADISON – Today, Senator Jeff Smith (D – Brunswick) introduced legislation alongside his Democratic colleagues to streamline Wisconsin’s unemployment insurance system and help workers receive quicker payments during future mass-layoff events.

This legislative package includes eight bills aimed at expanding unemployment insurance eligibility criteria and rolling back [detrimental policies](#) passed by Republicans between 2011 and 2018. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated exactly how the changes Republicans pushed for the last decade have made it more difficult for the Department of Workforce Development to administer the unemployment insurance program and how it’s slowed the process for workers to get critical assistance during mass-unemployment situations.

“Republicans made it harder for people to get unemployment. These policies were wrong when Republicans passed them and this pandemic showed us exactly why,” said Senator Jeff Smith. *“We introduced this legislative package today to right this series of wrongs in the unemployment insurance system, which began when Republicans passed consequential bills that have made it more difficult for Wisconsinites to get the support they need.”*

“Republicans delaying the one-week waiting period change cost Wisconsin \$25 million in federal unemployment assistance. Republicans have controlled Wisconsin’s purse strings for 10 years and still the unemployment software system cannot issue payments as effectively as it should. It’s been four months and they still haven’t fixed their mistakes. Enough is enough!”

“Incredible challenges have emerged as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic; unfortunately the decisions made by Republicans over the last decade have only exacerbated the already stressful situation. Like many of my colleagues, I’ve heard the personal stories from members of my own community impacted by these hurdles and I know we need to do something about it.”

The legislation introduced today by Senator Smith and his Democratic colleagues would provide relief for many Wisconsinites who have not been able to receive any assistance, thus far. The following constituent cases from Senator Smith’s office during this pandemic clearly show how unemployed workers have struggled due to the policies passed by Republicans between 2011 and 2018:

A woman who is blind couldn’t qualify for unemployment insurance benefits, although she works part time to supplement the meager SSDI payment she receives because of her disability.

A gentleman’s unemployment claim was held up because his employer transferred him to Minnesota. Due to Wisconsin’s burdensome verifications, he was delayed getting his unemployment until his claim was denied in Wisconsin so he can get his claim filed faster in Minnesota.

A woman who received short-term disability payments for undergoing medical treatments had her first week of unemployment held up which then held up all subsequent claims.

A young gentleman, fresh out of high-school was let go by his previous employer and found a new job. Due to suitability determinations, his current unemployment claim is stuck in adjudication.

“The policies made by Republicans in the last decade have very real consequences for so many Wisconsinites. During the most difficult time our unemployment system has faced, I commend Caleb on doing an incredible job with very little help from Republicans. I hope Republicans can recognize their policy failures, come to the table and do something about it.”

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The 31st Senate District includes all of Buffalo and Pepin counties and portions of Trempealeau, Pierce, Dunn, Eau Claire and Jackson counties and very small portions of Chippewa and St. Croix counties.