



## *Will Training Program Get Jobless Back to Work Faster?*

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*Jeneba Ghatt*

Is it me or does it seem the White House has been busier than ever organizing summits, rallying the troops, advancing initiatives and getting out in front on a myriad of issues that the President's base is concerned with?

It's only natural to give the impression your working harder during an election year. But: is the President working smarter? The answer to that question came in the form of one the Obama Administration's latest initiatives last week. The Department of Labor announced that it will give 10 states a chance to propose a plan that would give people collecting unemployment to get training and acquire new skills and job references while they look for work.

“Through this initiative, 10 states will have the opportunity to develop new and creative ways to help recipients of UI funds get back to work faster,” said Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis during a call with reporters. She added “... these states will design programs that help the unemployed get back to work, while lowering costs and ensuring that all participants receive the same worker protections.”

The plan is a key feature of a payroll tax cut package that President Barack Obama negotiated with congressional Republicans in February. Last Thursday, the Labor Department opened an application process for 10 model projects across the country for the “Bridge to Work” program.

The plan is modeled off existing states programs. North Carolina, Georgia, New Hampshire, Utah and Missouri have programs already that combine unemployment benefits with on-the-job training.

It appears the move would also get ahead of critics who have said that people on unemployment have little incentive to look for work. Michael Tanner, a Cato Institute Senior Fellow who is a leading critic of jobless benefits, has been leading the charge against unemployment insurance over the past couple of years. "A large body of economic evidence suggests that extending unemployment benefits increases unemployment and keeps people out of work longer," [writes Tanner](#) "This is because workers are less likely to look for work, or accept less-than-ideal jobs, as long as they are protected from the full consequences of being unemployed."

And Republicans are already sharpening their electoral knives for 2012, attempting to paint the incumbent as a "welfare state" President. GOP presumptive nominee Mitt Romney surrogate Gov. Chris Christie (R-NJ) recently blasted the administration by arguing recently that it was creating a nation of "... people sitting on the couch waiting for their next government check."

Now, the latest White House initiative could shield the administration from critics while pushing back against the assumption from the right that the President is creating a "food stamp" class. "This is a type of a program that allows more Americans under the unemployment insurance system to have greater opportunities to connect to work," White House National Economic Council Director Gene Sperling told reporters.

If you take this latest initiative into question, it becomes evidently clear there is a dual purpose. For one, there could be some real tangible moves to get out in front of the American people and let them see concrete steps to help them deal with the economy and other issues that impact and affect their daily lives.

States that are chosen could get waivers from the federal government allowing them to tap their unemployment insurance accounts to pay for such costs as transportation for workers in temporary jobs. Critics, however, worry that the program, when implemented nationally, may deplete resources and funds from the coffer set aside for the entitlement benefits.

Others were concerned that the program which this experiment is modeled after, Georgia Works, enabled businesses to get free labor while training the workers.

Solis said that it's up to states to design the programs and that any monetary funding should go to the employees rather than the business.

The plan passed with bi-partisan support from leading Republicans, including House Speaker John Boehner (R-OH) and House Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-VA).