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Extended unemployment benefits: making job hunters too picky?

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WASHINGTON -- Having finally vanquished Republican objections to extending jobless benefits, House Democrats on Wednesday called on the Senate to immediately pass its own stalled measure that would once again allow long-term unemployed to collect benefits for up to 99 weeks.

Rep. Jim McDermott, D-Seattle, one of Congress's most vociferous supporters for extending unemployment benefits, joined his fellow Ways and Means Committee members in decrying Republican filibuster that has repeatedly held up the bill in the Senate.

Many Republicans, and few Democrats, object to spending more than \$33 billion in federal dollars to step in after state unemployment checks dry up after 26 weeks.

But some conservatives also argue that lengthening jobless benefits actually may abet high unemployment rates by making job seekers too choosy. Michael D. Tanner of the Cato Institute, for instance, recently called for "[rethinking](#)" the consequences of people collecting unemployment checks for nearly two years.

"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," Tanner wrote. "That is not to say that anyone is getting rich off unemployment, or that unemployed people are lazy. But it is simple human nature that people are a little less motivated as long as a check is coming in.

The Wall Street Journal's editorial page also has questioned [McDermott's contention](#) that jobless benefits help rev the economy with consumer spending.

McDermott for his part dismisses the critics, saying that there is no evidence that people prefer unemployment checks to paychecks.

"They want to create the impression that there is a moral hazard," McDermott said. "It's just an excuse for inhumanity, in my opinion."

In Washington state, weekly jobless benefits range from \$135 to \$570. Of the 15 million unemployed Americans, nearly half of them have been out of work for six months or longer, and a quarter of them have been jobless for more than a year.

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