

# The Post and Courier

## Legislature needs to fix this

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Right now, there are thousands of people in South Carolina about to be kicked to the curb, literally and figuratively.

They lost their jobs in the spring, maybe even last year, on account of the economy. Now they can't find work. It's not like they don't want to pull their own weight but, in case you haven't noticed, there aren't a lot of places hiring right now.

These people have been out of work so long that their unemployment benefits have run out. A lot of them face the prospects of losing their homes or not feeding their kids.

Some choice.

"Their mortgages and rents don't get paid, they can't pay the light bill," said Sue Berkowitz, director of the Columbia-based Applesed Legal Justice Center. "Hopefully they know how to get food stamps so they can eat. But they can't afford gas to go out looking for a job."

Many of these folks were laid off, saw their jobs just plain eliminated. Earlier this year, the federal government offered a plan for people like that, through the stimulus program, that would extend their benefits another seven weeks.

All the state had to do -- as Katy Stech reported Friday in The Post and Courier -- was make one little accounting change in the law, a simple legislative fix.

But once again, politics got in the way of government.

### **Re-runs again**

When we last saw our Legislature, they were fighting the governor over federal stimulus money, a political spat that ended up in the state Supreme Court -- which was a monumental waste of time, by the way.

They also were squabbling over the Employment Security Commission. The governor wanted control of the commission and the legislature didn't want him to have it -- a variation on a re-run that's getting tiresome.

That federal program to help folks who were laid off popped up while all these great political leaders were sparring over bureaucratic hogwash and petty turf battles. Still, all they had to do for the state to qualify was change the economic index used to trigger emergency benefits (don't ask, but it's pretty innocuous).

But no one ever did it. Why?

Well, basically because the political fight consumed all, as usual. And the Employment Security Commission didn't sound the alarm either, perhaps because it was too busy fighting for its job to do its job.

"I think it broke down every step of the way," Berkowitz said. Her nonprofit, advocacy group tried to warn lawmakers, but they couldn't find anyone to take up the cause. Which is pitiful, given that South Carolina has one of the highest unemployment rates in the nation.

It raises the question: Who are those guys up there to serve?

Sorry, stupid question.

### **A quick fix**

The Legislature could fix this with an emergency session. Lawmakers could come back for a day, forego their pay (which governor hopeful Dwight Drake suggested Friday) and pass this minor change in the law.

Sure, some people would try to make it political, use it to crank up an impeachment circus. Glenn McConnell and Bobby Harrell wouldn't let that happen.

The good news is that lawmakers in both parties -- people from political orbits as separate as Sen. Robert Ford and Lt. Gov. Andre Bauer -- now want to fix this. Legislative leaders say, session or no, they will find a way to fix this. That's encouraging for all those folks about to be kicked to the curb.

It's just too bad politics got in the way in the first place.

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