

Three solutions to the jobs crisis Congress should adopt

By Mike Evangelist

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What is the most important thing that the federal government can do to help improve the U.S. economy?

When the [pollsters](#) at Gallup recently posed this open-ended question to the American public, the most popular response—“create jobs/hire more people”—received more than twice as much support as “cut spending,” which ranked a distant third on the list. From the rhetoric on cable news shows, one would never guess that Americans believe jobs are the nation’s [number one concern](#), much less that they support government taking an active role in job creation. Yet, over three-quarters of Americans and a [majority](#) of Republicans favor putting people back to work on critical infrastructure projects and passing legislation that would lead to the creation of more than a million new jobs. That Americans support active solutions from lawmakers should come as no surprise, given the state of the labor market.

Not only is the economy well over a million jobs short of prerecession employment levels, the percentage of the working-age population that is either employed or looking for work is at a 35-year low. As a result, there are nearly [six million](#) “missing” workers—over half in their prime working years—who are no longer in the labor force because of poor job prospects. This figure does not include four million long-term unemployed workers still actively searching for a job after being out of work for six months or more. Research finds that even well-qualified job applicants in this situation are [unlikely to be hired](#) by employers, a reality that will not improve until hiring picks up.

According to private sector [economists](#) and the experience of everyday American workers, Congress’s unhealthy obsession with fiscal austerity is costing the economy millions of jobs. Yet, despite lackluster job growth and a single-digit approval rating, Congress has doubled-down on this failed policy, enacting [\\$4 trillion](#) of job-killing budget cuts in recent years.

Indeed, job creation seems likely to be left out of an unfolding budget deal. Sen. Patty Murray (D-Wash.) and Rep. Paul Ryan (R-Wis.) are said to be close to averting another shutdown, but by all reports their deal neither fully repeals sequestration nor addresses the most critical issues

that matter to regular people, such as getting the economy back on track and creating job opportunities for unemployed workers.

One bright spot is that Democrats are committed to renewing federal unemployment insurance benefits, preventing 1.3 million unemployed workers from losing this vital lifeline at the end of the year. Unfortunately, the failure to repeal sequestration or to pursue other job creation measures all but guarantees that too many Americans will require jobless aid going forward, when what they really want is a job. In a [recent report](#), we proposed three common-sense policies that Congressional leaders should be considering if they were at all serious about putting Americans back to work.

1. End austerity: We begin with ending austerity measures that have cost the economy over [3 million](#) jobs since 2010. Sequestration—the most visible of the measures and the most easily addressed—is loathed by Democrats and Republicans, the public, and economists.

2. Prioritize immediate job creation: Create immediate employment opportunities for groups hit hard by the recession, including scaling up state programs that offer businesses incentives for hiring long-term unemployed workers, expanding existing volunteer and work-based training opportunities for youth and young adults, and rehire teachers and public safety workers who were laid off during the downturn.

3. Invest in our economy: Invest in pre-kindergarten programs and infrastructure to create millions of new jobs while improving our nation's productive capacity. Adopting universal pre-kindergarten and hiring unemployed workers to modernize the nation's roads, bridges, and buildings would improve our quality of life while making our economy more efficient and productive.

It's time to bring some common sense back into governing. Governors from both parties are already taking action by introducing incentives to hire the unemployed and investing in pre-kindergarten education and state infrastructure. We need federal policymakers to get on board, listen to the wisdom of the people, and finally take the jobs crisis head on.

Evangelist is a policy analyst with the National Employment Law Project.

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