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## ***A Question of Priorities***

**Congressman Elijah Cummings**

Americans want to work. We also believe that we should care for our neighbors who are out of work through no fault of their own.

These core insights about our nature as a great people are true throughout America - and especially in our communities of color.

This, I believe, is why so many Americans are deeply angered by the Senate Republicans' blocking extended unemployment benefits for those in need.

With all due respect, I must admit to being angered as well.

For millions of American families who are seeking work, the immediate challenge of economic survival is compelling.

This is why, on July 1, I was proud to join 240 other Democrats (as well as 29 courageous Republicans who rejected pressure by their Republican leadership) in approving an emergency measure: ***The Restoration of Emergency Unemployment Compensation Act*** (H.R. 5618).

We succeeded in that House of Representatives debate (270-153) despite the 142 Republicans who voted in opposition. Now, we need only to obtain Senate approval in order to extend benefits until November 30 - and retroactively restore federal compensation to Americans who were cut off as early as the end of May.

As of this writing, however, the Senate's support is being blocked from an "up-or-down" vote by its Republicans. We are witnessing the same tactics of obstruction that they used to attack our President and his Democratic congressional majority on healthcare reform.

This Republican filibuster is unacceptable and must be overcome.

We have stopped our nation's economic hemorrhaging. Yet, nearly one out of every ten American workers is still struggling to find work.

Despite losing their jobs through no fault of their own, moreover - and despite being required to look for work every day - nearly 2 million Americans now have been without jobs for so long that they have exhausted their state unemployment funds.

As of July 1, at least 12,000 of those increasingly desperate Americans are our neighbors right here in Maryland.

Under these difficult economic conditions, most Americans understand that prompt action to extend long-term unemployment benefits is an economic - as well as a moral - necessity for our country.

A June 1 survey conducted by the respected organization, Hart Research Associates, found that 67 percent of all Americans approve continuing federal unemployment benefits for those who have exhausted their state funds - while only 27 percent oppose that action.

Equally significant in the context of our slowly recovering economy, nearly three out of every four Americans believe that now is too soon to end unemployment compensation for their neighbors who are looking for work.

These overwhelming majorities reflect both our American values and our common sense. Consider this observation from Paul Krugman, Nobel Prize-Winning Economist, in the July 5 *New York Times*:

**“...Helping the unemployed, by putting money in the pockets of people who badly need it, helps support consumer spending. That's why the Congressional Budget Office rates aid to the unemployed as a highly cost-effective form of economic stimulus.... [A]id to the unemployed creates jobs quickly - while allowing that aid to lapse ... is a recipe for even weaker job growth, not in the distant future, but over the next few months....”**

If extending federal unemployment benefits is both good for our economy and morally justified, why, then, are Republicans fighting so hard to filibuster us from acting?

Only those who are totally detached from reality would suggest (as some leading Republicans have asserted) that any American family would choose to receive \$300-\$400 per month in unemployment benefits rather than go back to work at a well-paying job.

Economists advise us, moreover, that we are not going to bring our federal and state budgets back into balance by starving working families. The key to national economic recovery is precisely the opposite.

Knowing all this, however, we are left only with the suspicion that the Republican tactic of obstruction is grounded in raw politics.

We must conclude - unless shown otherwise - that Republican leaders, for political reasons, want the economic recovery that President Obama and congressional Democrats are building to fail.

This debate about the direction of our country, then, comes down to a question of priorities - a reality that America's voters should take to heart on Election Day this year.

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