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Congress loses interest in helping the unemployed

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If you are unemployed, the recession is over!

Franklin D. Roosevelt once said, "It is an unfortunate human failing that a full pocketbook often groans more loudly than an empty stomach." This statement rings true as we look at what is happening with the proposed [U.S. House](#) budget.

Safety net programs of all kinds would be reduced or eliminated. Energy assistance programs that help low-income families cope with rising oil and gas prices would be slashed. Community [Health Centers](#) that provide basic health care to millions of hard-working families are on the chopping block, along with employment and training programs that help the long-term unemployed gain a foothold in a slippery recovery.

With nearly 13.7 million people unemployed nationally and 170,000 in Connecticut, Congress has officially declared that the recession is over! So House Bill HR1 threatens to stop funding for all Workforce Investment Act (WIA) state and local adult, dislocated worker and youth training programs across the country -- a cut of more than \$3.6 billion. If enacted, these cuts will result in the closing of 3,000 One-[Stop Career Centers](#) across the country, at a time when we have unemployment rates at epic levels.

If the Workforce Investment Act is eliminated at the federal level, it will cripple the competitiveness of our country, our state and local communities, as well as negatively affecting current recipients who will lose funding in the middle of their educational journeys.

Who is using WIA programs? At-risk youth, such as high school drop-outs, juveniles, youth in foster care, minorities and youth with disabilities. These teens and young adults would no longer receive work experience, basic life skills and remedial education necessary for them to enter the work force. These youth are already experiencing a 21 percent unemployment rate.

Thousand of Connecticut job-seekers who face significant barriers to employment (recent immigrants, ex-offenders or even those with low skills) will not receive career counseling, vocational training, job-search skills or job-placement assistance.

And a whole new group of people is using WIA services in the new recession. Thousands of people are exhausting their 99 weeks of unemployment. Having looked diligently for a job, they very often learn they're no longer qualified for the jobs they have lost. Employers are doing more with less, and even people with long and solid work histories need training and career guidance to find their place in this new economy.

More importantly, without WIA the gap between businesses' need for skilled workers and adequate supply will increase. Many businesses say that they need more skilled workers to recover from this recession and that government has an appropriate training role.

Workforce Investment is just what the name says -- an investment in the work force, the people of our country. If we pull the rug out from under these programs now, we risk a human devastation of huge proportions, leaving millions of hardworking job-seekers without the skills and education to contribute and support themselves and their families.

WIA programs are held to high standards and proven to work. The only trainings offered are ones demanded by employers, and those that don't result in jobs don't last in the system. For too many people, the rules of the game have changed: hard work and devotion to your employer are no longer enough. For these people, WIA services are the only option -- the only rung on the ladder they can reach to begin the climb back to the life the recession took away.

The economy has been fragile and the recovery slow. Millions of hard-working Americans are tightening their belts every day and these safety-net programs have literally provided a life line. In the long run, the elimination or reduction of critical programs like the Workforce Investment Act will have repercussions for years to come. We may a save a dollar today, but we will most definitely pay for lack of these programs in other ways and for a long time to come.

Scott K. Wilderman is president and CEO of [Career Resources Inc.](#), a nonprofit agency that since 1995 has helped youth and adults succeed in the work force.

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