



News

LYNN COUPLE FEELING PINCH OF UNEMPLOYMENT

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LYNN —Â Jobless for six months, Vera Volk has relied on kind-hearted friends and money raised from selling possessions to make ends meet since her unemployment benefits ran out in December.

"I feel like I am breaking down: We have no money coming in,"□ the Lynn resident said.

Volk and her unemployed husband, Eric Vaughn, are among 3,300 North Shore residents who lost unemployment insurance benefits in December. U.S. Rep. John Tierney and local workforce development officials said nearly 1.3 million long-term unemployed individuals need unemployment benefits extended in order to pay their bills while they look for work.

Tierney on Monday said he has filed legislation extending federal unemployment insurance for three months. In a press statement, his office referred to the extension as “a commonsense step” needed to keep benefit payments averaging \$444 a week for Volk, Vaughn and 58,000 other unemployed Massachusetts residents.

“There’s a need for immediate action,” Tierney said.

Volk worked in a small Woburn firm developing diagnostic methods used in detecting cancer when the firm’s owner ran out of money and laid her off. Vaughn lost his information technology consultant’s job a month later, and the couple’s \$160,000 annual income plummeted to \$1,600 a month in unemployment benefits.

Volk has picked up small jobs from her former employer and recently landed occasional night and weekend work, but Vaughn said the couple have “cleaned out everything that looks like savings” in an attempt to stay in their East Lynn home and “put gas in the car.”

They spend their days and frequent nights searching online job sites for work and applying for jobs. Volk, 53, has also become a semi-public face for the unemployed: She said an advocacy organization seeking to aid unemployed Americans invited her to testify before Congress last December — three weeks before her benefits ran out.

At Tierney’s invitation, she discussed her joblessness and its toll on her personal life Monday during a telephone press conference. Unemployment worries keep her awake and — like Vaughn — she suffers from “anxiety attacks.”

“It’s very frustrating. I’m qualified for everything I apply for but there is a little bit of age discrimination going on out there,” she said.

Jobless residents receiving unemployment insurance are “active and engaged” in employment assistance programs, said North Shore Workforce Investment Board Executive Director Mary Sarris, but getting another job and launching another career can underscore the need, she said, to “reskill and retool.”

“It’s a long, hard haul. We all feel for each and every one of these folks,” Sarris said.

Tierney said Democrats and Republicans must work together to come up with comprehensive plans to accelerate the economy even while they agree on a short-term benefits extension. Tierney said past unemployment insurance extensions have passed 17 times in Congress during the last 10 years.

Volk said small and mid-sized businesses, like her former employer, need help surviving and expanding.

“How we keep ourselves going in this economy is to find opportunities,” she said.