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Editorial

## Congress, Can You Spare a Dime?

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Congress will not be in session this week. The legislators have all gone home, most to campaign, and are not expected back in Washington until Feb. 27. They left the capital without passing a law to extend unemployment benefits for 164,000 people who are still jobless from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, even though the benefits start to expire at the beginning of March.

There is no good reason for waiting until the last minute before granting an extension. It is beyond dispute that many hurricane victims face extraordinary hurdles in finding new jobs. What is the point of making them worry that their benefits will run out?

So far, Congressional action has amounted to a little bit here and a little bit there, without any constructive

conclusions. A House committee unanimously approved a bill for some 50,000 victims of Katrina and Rita, generally the self-employed, who are receiving federal disaster unemployment benefits. The bill would extend relief for an additional 26 weeks and raise the minimum benefit to \$135 a week. But House leaders never put the bill to a vote by the full House. The Senate, for its part, passed a bill that calls for a 13-week extension of Katrina-related federal disaster unemployment benefits, but does nothing for the estimated 25,000 people left unemployed from Hurricane Rita.

Neither the House nor the Senate has acted yet to extend the benefits of some 114,000 payroll employees from the private and public sectors who lost jobs to the hurricanes, even though such benefits were extended after 9/11 and many other times before, as circumstances required.

When it returns, Congress must act quickly to keep hurricane-related jobless benefits flowing. But as a motto by which to run the government, "better late than never" is pathetic.

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