

Job creations tour hits Holyoke

Dozens speak out to lawmakers on unemployment

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- Anaridis Rodriguez

HOLYOKE, Mass. (WWLP) - As jobless claims remain stagnant, state lawmakers are starting a jobs creation tour.

And the first stop on the jobs creation tour was Holyoke. The event resembled a town hall meeting where people came out to voice their frustrations and tell state lawmakers that the answer is not cutting funds from the unemployment benefits budget, but rather creating a stimulus.

"It hurts the economy, it hurts everybody's attitude," said Brenda Huerta from Chicopee.

What she's talking about is a reality millions are facing, unemployment.

"My husband and I were both laid off twice, within the past two and a half years, at the same time," said Huerta who for now has found a temporary job at Future Works.

Huerta was one of the dozens who testified in front of lawmakers in an effort to voice the challenges they face when trying to find employment.

"It's important that they don't cut the budgets anymore. As a matter of fact they should up the budgets because there are so many people out of work nowadays," said Huerta.

Jobs Creation Commission co-chair, Representative Joseph Wagner, was one of the handful of Beacon Hill lawmakers that listened to stories like Huerta's. Rep. Wagner told 22News he will take their testimonies to Boston and share them with other lawmakers, with the hope their experiences will spur job creation.

"We are proactive by simply stepping to the plate and saying 'this isn't enough, we need much more.' And if it requires that we look to cut in other areas, and that's always the challenge," said Rep. Wagner.

U.S Jobless claims have not dipped below 400,000 since April. Analysts at the forum said the crippling economy is not only draining the pockets of the unemployed, but it is also hurting the organizations that are trying to help people find a job.

"In the last five years we've actually gone from almost 40 employees down to about 26," said David Gadaire, Career Point's executive director

Gadaire testified on behalf of his unemployment agency Career Point. This year, legislation cut close to \$2 million from the agency's budget. It was a measure that led to the layoff of almost half of his workforce and the elimination of essential programs.

"When the number of people coming to see us isn't going down, it's going up. And the number of people available to serve them, the number of programs, are going down. Our people at the end of the day are wondering 'are we doing a good job,'" said Gadaire.

According to the U.S Department of Labor, the unemployment rate in Springfield is 8.4%, one percentage point above the state's percent rate of 7.4.

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