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Durbin visits SWIC, addresses unemployed workers

Illinois unemployment at 10.2%

By Brittany Palmer
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BELLEVILLE – Robert Descamps and David Dasher are two unemployed welding students attending Southwestern Illinois College through the Workforce Investment Act.

On Wednesday, Descamps, Dasher and other SWIC students met with Sen. Dick Durbin, a Springfield Democrat, to talk about how this federal government helps people get back to work.

Descamps is involved in the welding program at the East St. Louis campus and will be fully certified December 20.

"I lost my job (at American Steel) on 11-7 of last year. I have four kids and basically no health insurance," he said.

Dasher lost his job at Central Mine in April.

"(The Workforce Investment Act) is paying for school for welding. Because of them, I will graduate in December with high honors," he said.

The Workforce Investment Act assists in disadvantaged and dislocated individuals, said Bill Gagen, director of workforce development at SWIC.

"We make sure they are in the right classes, and don't have to spend money," he said.

Durbin spoke with the small group of unemployed workers.

"I think it is important for us to get out of Washington and hear your stories," Durbin told the group.

He informed them of a bill signed into last last week by President Barack Obama. The legislation extends unemployment insurance for 14 additional weeks, plus an additional six weeks to states with an unemployment rate higher than 8.5 percent, which includes Illinois.

"The statewide unemployment rate is at 10.2 percent. There are six people unemployed for every job," Durbin said.

Six months ago, the federal government decided to pay for job retraining programs that will help dislocated workers receive the skills necessary to gain employment. St. Clair County received \$760,000 for adult workforce investment programs and more than \$1 million for dislocated workforce programs.

Durbin said he thinks it is important to show people that those who are unemployed, are not enjoying it.

"Some people have the image that unemployed people are the happiest people in the world. They're wrong. The fact that you're getting up and trying means a lot," he said.