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## Durbin hears success stories from Elgin career center

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If the American economy is to recover, Sen. Dick Durbin says, the last place the federal government should cut funding is from career development sites like the Illinois workNet Center in Elgin.

During a visit to the center Tuesday, Durbin met with staff members and program participants to discuss the value of support services that help people get back into the workforce.

The Elgin workNet Center, which provides an array of employment and training services from resume assistance to educational financial aid, is funded through the Workforce Investment Act.

"So many people are unemployed that we've got to create tools to help them look for jobs, retrain and then return back into the workforce," said Durbin, who called the stories inspiring. "We talk about cutting the programs, but where else would people turn?"

Durbin said while some in Washington argue that such programs make people lazy and unwilling to look for employment, those who shared their stories Tuesday epitomized the critical need for funding.

"Workforce development facilities help those workers who are determined to find new jobs learn the skills they need to find employment in their geographic area," Durbin said in a news release. "At a time when nearly 14 million Americans remain unemployed, and the unemployment rate in Elgin is about 11 percent, we must maintain critical services that are helping get people back to work."

When Bartlett resident Bob Thomas lost his job as a tiler, the odd jobs and unemployment payments barely covered his family's living expenses, including a \$2,200 monthly mortgage payment.

Adding to the stress, his wife, who was in the mortgage business, also lost her job when the housing market bombed.

Last fall, at the age of 50, Thomas enrolled at Elgin Community College with the help of the Elgin workNet Center.

"I was a jack-of-all trades, master of none," Thomas said. "When I started school last August ... I got a 4.0 in my first semester and I was like a school junkie."

In May, he graduated as a certified heating, ventilation and air conditioning technician. He now works for Lang Jones LaSalle.

"You are investing in America by putting us back to work," Thomas said. "You putting us back to work is your payment for the investment."

Matt Legoretta, 40, who was laid off from his job with a printing company, called the Workforce Investment Act program a godsend.

The College of DuPage respiratory therapy student said without the financial aid, he would not have had the opportunity to go back to school.

The Yorkville resident who worked with the North Aurora Illinois workNet office, said he is the only student in his class who has a job lined up once he graduates.