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Bush budget does little for those seeking work

Less than a week after his State of the Union address, President Bush sent to Congress a \$2.23 trillion budget that reflects nothing more than smoke-and-mirror politics. Despite his well-spun claim to support job-seeking Americans, the president's new spending plan puts the federal deficit well over the \$300 billion mark yet leaves the nation's jobless with little support and undermines the country's primary employment program.

Let's be clear about what the President is not doing to put Americans back to work.

First, the president is not spending enough on the unemployed: 8.6 million jobless Americans. His multitrillion-dollar budget offers a meager 0.07 percent—seven-tenths of 1 percent—for a "Back to Work Incentive" Act. This newfangled legislation suggests creating personal re-employment accounts (PRAs) that some unemployed could use for employment services, skills training or bonuses for finding work fast. On the surface, that may not sound too bad. But considering start-up costs and the current jobless numbers, these funds will go quickly.

Second, the president is not reaching enough of those who are trying to rejoin America's working class—you know, those would-be millionaires who aren't cashing in on dividends and instead are counting their pennies before their unemployment runs out. But limited employment funds and complicated rules for PRA qualification mean that the majority of the people in need won't benefit. We already have seen thousands of people exhaust their unemployment insurance, and by springtime, experts estimate another 51,000 Illinoisans will be without any support.

Third, the president is not passing on any favors to the states. His budget calls for significant disinvestments in the primary employment program on which the states rely: the Workforce Investment Act's One Stop Career Centers, affiliated providers, and certified skills trainers. In Illinois last year, WIA providers worked hard to serve 40,988 dislocated workers, disadvantaged adults and youth in a tight labor market.

*Robert E. Wordlaw,
Executive Director
Chicago Jobs Council, Chicago*