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Frustration and Despair as Job Search Drags On

By MICHAEL LUO

CARLISLE, Ky. — In her well-thumbed, leather-bound Bible, Terri Sadler recently highlighted in bright pink a passage in the Gospel of Matthew.

In it, Jesus urges his followers not to “worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself.”

But Ms. Sadler’s tightening throat and halting breath when she tries to read the words aloud make it clear that she is having trouble mustering enough faith to follow them.

Ms. Sadler, who lost her job at an automotive parts plant in October 2008, learned last month that her unemployment insurance had been cut off. She is one of an estimated 2.1 million Americans whose benefits have expired and who are waiting for an end to an impasse that has lasted months in the Senate over extending the payments once more to the long-term unemployed.

Times have changed politically, however, and opposition is growing in Washington and abroad to deficit-bloating government spending, even for those who are hurting.

For Ms. Sadler, and many like her, each passing day has become an excruciating countdown of debts and deadlines.

“I’m basically applying for everything, trying to get something,” said Ms. Sadler, 52, who since early June has not received an unemployment check, which used to be about \$388 a week before taxes. “If I don’t, I’m going to lose everything. I’m not going to have a roof over my head. I’m just going to have to walk away with what I have on my back, and my dog.”

She is down to \$44 in her purse and a quarter-tank of gas. She says she has exhausted the help of family and friends.

Members of her tiny Baptist church just up the road from her cramped mobile home pooled their money on Sunday to come up with her car payment and insurance. A county ministerial association paid her water bill. A nonprofit organization covered her last two electric bills.

A notepad on her refrigerator lists the other outstanding bills: \$102 cellphone, \$79 cable and Internet, which she relies on for job-hunting; \$15 for her credit card; and \$30 for an end table she had bought on layaway. Not listed was \$275 for her rent this month, which she still owes.

Every morning, after Ms. Sadler takes her dog out and turns on the coffee maker, she switches on the television to C-Span. Then she cracks open her laptop to resume a job hunt that has become frantic.

But as she has run low on money, her search has also become increasingly circumscribed. She used to drive to drop off résumés with businesses; now she is mostly limited to scanning online listings.

Ms. Sadler eagerly tuned in to C-Span last Monday, mistakenly believing that Senate Democrats returning from recess would quickly take up the unemployment insurance extension. But they remain a vote short of being able to block a Republican [filibuster](#), forcing them to wait for [Carte Goodwin](#), the successor to Senator [Robert C. Byrd](#), who died last month, to be sworn in. The Senate majority leader, [Harry Reid](#), said the vote on an extension would occur on Tuesday.

The measure is now expected to pass, but advocates for unemployment insurance are hardly declaring victory yet. Fears about the country’s skyrocketing deficit, which are at the heart of Republican objections, have gained growing prevalence, even with moderate Democrats. Economic arguments that

additional government spending is needed to spur the economy have been swamped.

Some Republican politicians have argued that continuing to extend unemployment benefits offers a disincentive for the jobless to find work. Supporters of unemployment insurance counter that job openings remain in short supply.

Ms. Sadler estimates that she used to spend six hours a day searching for work; now it is at least double that amount of time.

“There’s been times I’ve had to make myself stop looking for jobs because it was driving me nuts,” said Ms. Sadler, who admitted that she had contemplated suicide.

Every day has become a tense scramble, highlighting just how thin the governmental safety net for the jobless becomes beyond unemployment benefits. After Ms. Sadler was cut off from jobless benefits, she qualified for \$200 a month in food stamps, but food stamps do not pay her bills, nor do they cover other necessities.

She recently wrote to Tom’s of Maine, because she uses the company’s toothpaste, mouthwash and deodorant, asking whether it might be able to donate some products to her. But she was informed that the company usually gives only to nonprofit organizations.

Ms. Sadler lives alone here in this small town in the northern part of the state, where Amish are sometimes spotted heading down the main road with horse and buggy. She has only her 2-year-old dog, Tootie-muffin, for company.

Before she lost her job, she had enrolled in community college to study medical billing and coding. She finished the program in May, but most of the medical billing jobs she has applied for require experience. The framed certificate, and another one for data entry, on her bedroom wall are just decorations at this point.

How she landed in this predicament is a product of both mistakes she made and forces beyond her

control. She dropped out of high school and had her daughter, Chastity, at age 15. She started working in factories soon after and eventually earned her G.E.D. She had managed to scratch out a relatively comfortable life before she lost her job, making \$14.65 an hour at Vuteq, in Georgetown, Ky., a company that makes sun roofs and windshields for [Toyota](#).

But she never accumulated much savings, besides \$3,000 she had socked away in a [401\(k\)](#) account, which she quickly ran through. She has always had a thing for [Ford Mustangs](#) and bought a used red one in 2006 that she now admits was a bad decision.

She filed for bankruptcy in March 2009 and was allowed to keep her car on a reduced payment schedule, but she was barred from selling it.

After moving several times, she finally found her mobile home here, with cheap green siding and outdated wood paneling, at a monthly rent she could afford on unemployment insurance.

She had used up 79 weeks of benefits but was expecting an additional 20 weeks under the extended federal program.

On Tuesday, Ms. Sadler scored just her third interview since 2008, for a \$7.50-an-hour job at a check-cashing business that is an hour's drive from her home. It would have paid less than she received on unemployment benefits and left her still unable to cover her expenses, but she had little choice.

It took all her willpower not to reach across the table to shake her interviewer and beg for a chance. The company said she would know by Thursday, but as of Friday she had not heard back.



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