

Patiently Waiting: Construction Workers Still Can't Find Jobs

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"There was a time there where I thought I would commit suicide, just so my family could get my pension money," said 48-year-old construction worker, Danny Chavarria.

With over 25 years of experience in construction, Chavarria was dismissed from his job at Devcon Construction in 2007 and has not fully recovered in spite of President Obama's Recovery Act, who's main job is to create them.

Chavarria is now filing for his third extension of unemployment benefits and is number seven on the Carpenters Union Local 505's hall list, which serves as a waiting list for the unemployed who are actively seeking a job. He has also switched roles with his wife—who now cares for the family financially like he once did.

But the job market for construction workers is especially discouraging. The February 2010 report for the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) shows that construction employment fell by 64,000 in the United States. This comes as no surprise. CNN's Economy Tracker has kept an eye out for quite some time and reports California as having a 36 percent decrease in the construction industry since 2007. Adding insult to injury, Santa Cruz County—where Chavarria worked—has an unemployment rate which stands at 13.5 percent—well above the national average.

And although the Obama Administration has created jobs for some, many Americans have not seen significant job growth in their communities, but continue hearing about success stories throughout the country. For instance, President Obama's 3,500 onsite construction jobs for the new nuclear power plant in Georgia are anything but tangible for Chavarria, who says it "must be nice, but that doesn't do me any good, I'm not goin' to Georgia."

But something that is sure to make an impact is the \$8 billion in new railroad grants funded by the federal economic stimulus law, which is expected to create thousands of new transportation construction jobs. Out of the \$8 billion, California was awarded \$2.5 billion in funds—the biggest chunk. But the production of this new high-speed rail is still on hold, which means that the jobs are placed on hold as well.

The Recovery Act website shows California has been awarded the greatest amount of money out of all the states—over \$20.3 trillion. So far California has actually received a little over \$7.6 trillion in aid and Santa Cruz County has been awarded hundreds of grants but jobs are still scarce. Tired of waiting, Chavarria and his brother—who also worked in construction—took it upon themselves to find a job, driving up and down the state only to be turned down by many employers.

However, President Obama has made it clear that he will not stop working for the American people. In his speech on creating new jobs he said “When it comes to domestic policy, I have no more important a job as President than seeing to it that every American who wants to work and is able to work can find a job—and a job that pays a living wage.” This helps to keep Chavarria hopeful, who also feels that the President was left with a “big mess” and that “he’s doing the best he can do.”

The economic downturn of our time continues to impact the lives of many Americans; Danny Chavarria is just one out of the millions.