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Originally published Monday, June 13, 2011 at 7:55 PM

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Cantwell aims to restore job-training funds

U.S. Sen. Maria Cantwell championed resources for the unemployed in Seattle on Monday. Funding for work training and placement resources will see cuts on July 1.

By [Jessie Van Berkel](#)
Seattle Times staff reporter

Leonard Luna was working toward his master's in education when he became ill and had a stroke. Then his wife went through three bouts of brain surgery.

The United States Postal Service retiree started hunting for jobs. During his two-year search he depended on WorkSource, a resource for job seekers that ultimately led him to his new job as a flagger for Altus Traffic.

Luna, 61, used WorkSource's website to view job postings and went to workshops at its centers. But he and 120,000 other job seekers who visit WorkSource annually in King County might see a change when funding is scaled back July 1.

More than \$1 billion was cut from work-force development programs nationwide in the 2011 budget as members of Congress worked to fix the federal deficit. The Senate passed the reductions after rejecting a House proposal that would have cut far deeper — eliminating all funding for the Workforce Investment Act that supports many of the resource centers.

U.S. Sen. Maria Cantwell is trying to bump that level back up in 2012.

More cuts in the area are "a step in the wrong direction," Cantwell said Monday at South Seattle Community College, where she met with local business leaders and toured a green-jobs training class.

On Friday, Cantwell and 28 other members of Congress sent a letter to the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education asking it to return funding for work-force development, including Workforce Investment Act cash, back to 2010 levels.

"In light of our tenuous economic recovery, additional cuts to these important programs would undermine workforce preparedness and long-term economic growth," the letter stated.

In Washington there are jobs available, Cantwell said, and the struggle is preparing and matching qualified individuals with openings. Training programs are necessary to fill the gap, she said.

Programs funded by the Workforce Investment Act served 209,000 Washingtonians last year, according to Washington's 2010 report on use of act funding.

New cuts will mean a loss of close to 10 percent of funding in King County for work development and placement programs, said Marlena Sessions, CEO of the Workforce Development Council, a Seattle nonprofit.

That could mean one or two of the seven WorkSource centers — like the ones Luna used — will close, Sessions said. She said there also will be less time devoted to people who come in seeking guidance.

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