

Washington, DC — Hailing from a state with the highest unemployment rate in the country, Representative Darlene Hooley (D-Oregon City) and fellow Oregon Democrats today led the House of Representatives in signing a discharge petition to immediately bring legislation that would extend federal unemployment benefits to the House floor for a vote. Oregon's unemployment rate currently stands at 8.0 percent. The discharge petition was introduced by Hooley and signed by House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif), and Representatives Earl Blumenauer (D-Portland), Peter DeFazio (D-Springfield), and David Wu (D-Portland).

The discharge petition would force immediate consideration of H.R. 3244, which would extend unemployment insurance through June 2004 and increase the length of the benefit from 13 to 26 weeks. The retroactive increase in benefit length would recapture nearly 1 million people who continue to seek employment but have exhausted their benefits.

On October 15, Representatives Hooley, Blumenauer, and DeFazio also sent a letter to House Speaker J. Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.), asking that legislation to extend federal unemployment benefits either be brought to the floor soon or be attached to the Emergency Supplemental Appropriations bill being considered on the House floor that week. Previously, Wu had introduced legislation, HR 3156, to provide an immediate 13-week extension of federal unemployment benefits.

“Workers between jobs are looking for work, but the jobs simply are not there. These workers need this benefits extension to pay their mortgages and feed their families while we also focus on turning around our economy,” said Hooley.

On October 1, 12,000 Oregonians ran out of all state and federal unemployment benefits - including the federal extension for states with long-term high unemployment rates. An additional 400 Oregonians have run out of all available benefits each week since.

“This Congress is on the verge of providing an additional \$87 billion to Iraq, yet refuses to bring forth legislation that can help people here at home at a fraction of the cost,” said Blumenauer. “I commend my colleague from Oregon, Darlene Hooley, for leading this important effort to correct that situation. Providing assistance to the thousands of Oregon families who have lost their employment benefits is long overdue. Today we have a chance to provide relief to the families who have been hardest hit by the prolonged economic downturn.”

"For unemployed Oregonians, it is these benefits that keep their kids in college and prevent the loss of a home, a car, or vital health care," said Wu. "Congress must do what's right and pass this unemployment extension now."

"\$20 billion sit in the unemployment trust fund for a rainy day," said DeFazio. "For the 9 million unemployed in the United States and 145,000 unemployed in Oregon, it's been raining for months. If the Bush Administration and Republican leaders refuse to tap the trust fund and provide extended unemployment benefits for the millions of long-term unemployed workers who, through no fault of their own, have found themselves on the wrong side of this jobless recovery, then we'll work around them. This is a domestic crisis and Congress must act immediately."

A discharge petition is the main mechanism to force a House vote on legislation that has been bottled up in committee. If the discharge petition receives 218 signatures, the House of Representatives will consider the measure immediately.

Oregon has maintained one of the highest unemployment rates in the country for the past two years, prompting the Democratic members of the Oregon delegation to continue pushing the administration for legislation that will help Oregon families.