

WASHINGTON, DC—US Rep. Peter DeFazio (D-Springfield) was joined today by fellow Oregon Reps. Darlene Hooley (D-West Linn) and Earl Blumenauer (D-Portland) in sending a letter to House Speaker J. Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.) to ask that benefits be extended for the long-term unemployed.

In the letter sent today, the lawmakers asked 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 this week. Oregon lawmakers introduced legislation last week, HR 3156, to provide an immediate 13-week extension of federal unemployment benefits.

“Congress is preparing this week to borrow \$87 billion in the name of the American people to pay Iraqis for no-show, no-work jobs for the stability of the Iraqi society,” said DeFazio. “Yet the President and Republican leaders are not willing to release money from the unemployment trust fund, which has a \$20 billion surplus, to 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.”

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 will run out of all available benefits each week.

“The \$87 billion supplemental will create jobs abroad and bolster Iraq's economy,” said Hooley. “There's no excuse why Congress and the President can't extend benefits to ensure we keep Oregon families and the local economy going.”

“Recently, the leadership in our country has demonstrated that its priorities are out of step with the American public, favoring expensive wars and tax cuts for the wealthy over relief for families who need help the most,” said Blumenauer. “Today represents a chance to focus on providing relief to those families in Oregon who have been hardest hit by the prolonged economic downturn.”

Oregon's unemployment rate currently stands at 8 percent, the highest in the nation. Oregon has maintained one of the highest unemployment rates in the country for the past two years. (

Text of the letter is below

)

-30-

October 14, 2003

The Honorable Dennis Hastert, Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232 Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Hastert:

We are writing to urge you to bring legislation providing unemployment benefits for long-term unemployed workers to the floor for consideration at the earliest possible opportunity. We also ask you to consider attaching such legislation to the Emergency Supplemental Appropriations legislation which the House will consider later this week.

We recognize that extended unemployment benefits for unemployed U.S. workers was not included in the President's emergency funding request, however the growing number of long-term unemployed in this country, which reached a 20-year high in September, is a domestic emergency which deserves immediate attention. These workers who, through no fault of their own, have found themselves on the wrong end of the jobless recovery, and deserve our help.

Nationally, 1.65 million workers have exhausted all unemployment benefits - both their regular state benefits and the federal extension. No state in the country has felt the burden of the economic downturn more than the state of Oregon which has had the highest unemployment rate in the country for 21 of the past 24 months. As of October 1st, 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 will run out of all available benefits each week.

As you know, the Congressional Budget Office's August economic forecast predicts that the employment outlook will not improve any time soon. In fact, CBO expects the national unemployment rate will average 6.2% throughout the rest of 2003 and 2004. Oregon's unemployment rate is expected to remain higher than the national average.

Although the President has asked Congress to borrow the \$87 billion in the name of the American people to pay for re-building Iraq, the federal unemployment insurance trust funds contain large reserves that can be used to provide additional extended unemployment benefits without borrowing the money, or requiring additional unemployment insurance taxes.

We hope you will recognize this domestic emergency and allow the House to vote on legislation to extend unemployment benefits for the long-term unemployed as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

PETER A. DeFAZIO

DARLENE HOOLEY

EARL BLUMENAUER