

Oregon unemployment benefits expanded

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

SALEM, Ore. - Governor Ted Kulongoski on Tuesday signed into law Senate Bill 462, legislation that will allow 6,000 more unemployed Oregonians to qualify for unemployment benefits. The bill comes at a crucial time when more Oregonians are looking for work and need assistance to make ends meet as they seek employment. "People across Oregon are struggling and this bill is critical to keeping food on the table and shelter overhead for those who have lost their job due to the declining economy," Governor Kulongoski said. "By changing how benefits are calculated we are opening the door for thousands of Oregonians to get help when they desperately need it." Current law determines eligibility for benefits based on something called a "Base Year." Wages are counted in four of the last five calendar quarters but wages from the most recent completed quarter are not counted. Senate Bill 462 creates an "Alternative Base Year" which counts wages from the four most recent completed quarters. Due to this change in calculation, more Oregonians will be eligible for benefits. The law also allows Oregon to receive \$85 million dollars in federal funds from the Unemployment Insurance Modernization Act under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 to further enhance the state unemployment insurance system. "With this bill we will be able to take advantage of federal dollars to help Oregon provide more efficient and comprehensive unemployment insurance services to the people who need them," Governor Kulongoski said. Unemployment benefits come from an employer-paid trust fund. The fund is automatically adjusted to provide eighteen months of benefits through a moderate recession. Currently, Oregonians can receive a minimum of \$138 and a maximum of \$443 per week for as many as 79 weeks (including a federal \$25 per week addition). The state Employment Department will contact individuals who will qualify for benefits under this new law, which takes effect on July 1, 2009.

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