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NEWS RELEASE

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Budget Committee Approves Unemployment Eligibility Expansion

SB 462 would allow state to access federal funds to help more out-of-work Oregonians

SALEM – The Joint Ways and Means Committee today passed Senate Bill 462, which would help 5,600 Oregonians qualify for unemployment benefits and would make the state of Oregon eligible for \$91 million in federal funds under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

“We are working to provide jobs to rebuild our economy and prepare for a brighter future,” said Representative Betty Komp (D-Woodburn). “In the meantime, we need to help those Oregonians who are out of work by giving them the assistance they need to land on their feet.”

Some workers losing their jobs during this economic crisis are not receiving unemployment benefits, even though their employers paid unemployment taxes for them. This is because the state uses outmoded eligibility rules that ignore recent months of work. SB 462 would fix this problem.

“At a time when Oregon’s unemployment rates haven’t shown any sign of falling, it is our responsibility to make sure that the out of work are getting the help they need to put food on the table,” said Sen. Margaret Carter (D-Portland), co-chair of the Joint Ways and Means Committee. “Thousands of Oregonians have been denied unemployment under our current system. Changing our calculations is necessary in these challenging times.”

SB 462 would allow workers who do not qualify using the standard method for determining eligibility to use an alternative method that includes more recent months of work. Laid-off workers would still have to meet the requirement that they work 500 hours or earn \$1,000 before being laid off in order to qualify for benefits.

“Oregon’s high unemployment rate demands that we help as many struggling families as possible,” said Representative David Edwards (D-Hillsboro). “We have an opportunity to receive \$91 million from the federal stimulus bill, and we must take advantage of it.”

In enacting SB 462, Oregon would follow the lead of 20 states and the District of Columbia that have adopted the alternative method. These jurisdictions have reported little difficulty in implementing the alternative approach.

“We need to take advantage of opportunities to leverage federal dollars to help Oregonians,” said Senator Diane Rosenbuaam (D-Portland), chair of the Senate Commerce and Workforce Development Committee, where SB 462 originated. “Changing our systems so they accurately reflect recent work activity will help thousands of Oregonians while having no impact on the Oregon General Fund.”

SB 462 now moves to the Senate for a full vote before moving to the House floor.

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