



June 2, 2021

Return-to-Work Bonuses
An Important Priority for American Rescue Plan Funding
Action is needed now to address worker shortages

Since the beginning of the COVID pandemic, many Oregon businesses have faced the very difficult reality of curtailed operations due to government-ordered shut downs, stay home orders and COVID-driven declines in their markets. They have supported efforts designed to keep Oregonians safe, but the cost has been great, as jobs were lost and businesses closed.

Over the last 15 months, the federal and state governments have appropriately invested in extra benefits for workers to help them weather this storm. Oregon has created several funds designed to help workers forced to stay home due to job elimination, school closures, loss of child care, illness and a variety of other reasons.

Now we are asking you to invest in helping us bring those employees back to work.

Workplaces are safe. Vaccines are available to virtually any Oregonian who wants one. Businesses have changed how they operate, implementing complex safety measures designed to protect workers, customers and the public. We are ready to get back to work, but we are having a very hard time convincing employees to join us.

Virtually every industry in the state is experiencing a workforce challenge. Quality jobs are going unfilled: if this continues, it could hinder economic recovery for Oregon. We know that qualified workers are not yet returning to their jobs for several reasons. A recent survey by the National Governor's Association found three significant factors 1) rich unemployment benefits and other government payments; 2) childcare challenges; and 3) safety concerns related to health.

We appreciate the steps the state has taken to address these issues. The campaign to encourage COVID vaccinations is undoubtedly the best way to address safety concerns. Safely reopening schools and expanding childcare options will ease the challenges facing parents, and we all recognize this must be a continuing area of focus.

But we have to deal with the financial incentives as well. We are asking you to create an incentive plan to encourage unemployed Oregonians to accept work when it is offered. Other states have created return-to-work incentives and we believe Oregon should do the same.

Please consider using American Rescue Plan funds to create an incentive program aimed at encouraging people to accept work rather than relying on continued unemployment benefits. A modest return-to-work bonus may tip the balance for an out-of-work Oregonian deciding whether to stay home or move back to a job.

This can't wait. Business has been hit hard by the COVID pandemic, and we all want them back on their feet again. They need workers to operate successfully. Jobs are open, you can help get them filled.

Please take action to provide workers with an incentive to go back to work so our state's economy can get back to normal. It is time.