

Unemployment

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The Bush-supported Economic Security and Worker Assistance Act passed last month in the House before Congress adjourned, but was unable to find support in the Senate.

University students and graduates are feeling the economic crunch already.

"Our alumni traffic has been up," University Career Center director Larry Smith said. The center used to help three to five grads a week with job searches; it's now three to five a day.

"Oregon clearly needs some assistance right now," Smith said.

Political maneuvering for an economic stimulus package began this week when Sen. Tom Daschle, D-S.D., offered a compromise package intended to satisfy both political parties.

Daschle's compromise, which Republicans have indicated they will consider, focuses on issues the two parties agree on, such as a 13-week extension of unemployment benefits and a \$300 one-time payment for low income workers.

James Daniels, a laid-off Whittier Wood Products employee, welcomed the idea of a \$300 one-time payment.

"I'd probably put it toward rent," Daniels said while filing for unemployment at the Oregon Employment Department in Eugene. He has been out of a job for more than a month and is "looking for a job right away."

Daniels added that a 13-week extension would ease the pressure of finding a job immediately.

But Tim Nesbit, Oregon's AFL-CIO union president, said the 13-week extension won't help Oregon at all. That's because Oregon has the worst economy in the nation, and the 13 extra weeks of unemployment benefits are already in effect in the state. However, it's possible that the federal extension, if implemented, would run concurrently with the state benefits.

"The overlap could work for Oregon's advantage," Nesbit admitted.

Anne Swensen of the Oregon Employment Department said the need for assistance is even greater in the winter months. During the

winter, there's a rise in seasonal unemployment as companies such as timber industries give out pink slips. It's even worse this year.

"We see a lot of people temporarily laid off," Swensen said. She added that more people than ever have filed for unemployment in the last three months. Since October, more than 14,000 claims have been filed with the Eugene office — an increase of 53.5 percent from last year's figures.

Cindy Puetz, a laid-off Albertson's checker, is one of the statistics. Right now she's covered for health insurance through the Oregon Health Plan — but only because she isn't making any money. Puetz said she's discouraged with the lack of jobs right now, and has given up looking. She brightened at the mention of a \$300 one-time payment, however.

"I'd put gas in the car and pay the electric bill and phone bill," Puetz said.

Christian Kremer uses his unemployment benefits to subsidize his job at Tri Willow Nursery. During the winter months, his company cuts back his hours to one day a week. Kremer said that unemployment covers 40 percent of his income, and together with his part-time job he manages to get by. While he isn't depending on Congress to help him pay his bills, others are.

"A lot of people are laid-off," Kremer said. "For some of them, it's an urgent issue."

For others, unemployment relief is the last thing on their minds. Shane Feinstein, a high school student filling out paperwork at the Oregon Employment Department, said she just wants a job, not unemployment assistance.

"I'm looking for a part-time job to pay the rent," Feinstein said. Although she's planning to get an Oregon Trail Card to help with her grocery bills, she's hoping to find a job as soon as possible.

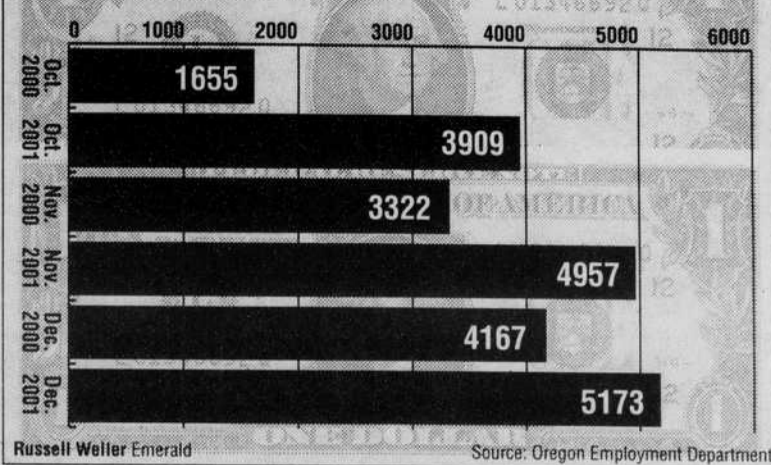
Larry Smith, the Career Center director, said that students shouldn't give up job searches just because the economy is down.

"It's going to be harder, it's going to take more persistence, but if students work at it, they have a good chance of getting a job," Smith said.

E-mail reporter Brook Reinhard at brookreinhard@dailyemerald.com.

Economic problems hit home

Oregon has the worst economy in the nation with a record number of Oregonians filing for unemployment this winter



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Campaign finance laws brought to House vote

By Jackie Koszczuk
Knight Ridder Newspapers

WASHINGTON — Rebel lawmakers in the House of Representatives forced the Republican leadership Thursday to let them vote on a bill to overhaul the nation's campaign finance laws, emboldened by the Enron scandal and the harsh spotlight it is shining on money in politics.

House Speaker Dennis Hastert, R-Ill., who has blocked efforts to bring the issue to a vote since last summer, backed down Thursday after the measure's advocates won the final signatures they needed to put a majority of lawmakers behind a petition demanding action.

Rep. Richard Neal, D-Mass., provided the 218th signature, giving supporters a majority of the 435-seat House. In all, 197 Democrats signed the petition, joined by 20 Republicans and one independent.

That sets the stage for a House vote this year on a bill that would make the most sweeping changes to campaign laws since the post-Watergate revisions of the mid-1970s. The House bill is co-sponsored by Reps. Christopher Shays, R-Conn., and Martin Meehan, D-Mass. Its biggest change would be to ban "soft

money," the five- and six-figure donations to the two major political parties, as distinct from contributions to candidates' campaigns.

A similar bill passed the Senate last April.

If the House passes the legislation, the new rules could go into effect in time for November's congressional elections, when partisan control of each closely divided chamber of Congress is up for grabs.

House proponents credited the Enron scandal with helping them secure the final signature.

"It shows a majority of the House is aware of the corrupting influence of big money in politics," Shays said. "The growing Enron scandal, and the enormous sums of money the company contributed to gain influence, underscores this point."

Before it went bankrupt Dec. 2, Enron was a major player in the Washington money game. It spent nearly \$6 million on politicians and both political parties over the past 10 years, according to the Center for Responsive Politics, a research center that tracks money in politics.

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