



Commissioner Brad Avakian

Bureau of Labor and Industries

Press Release

For Immediate Distribution

March 16, 2009

CONTACT: Ben DuPree 971-673-0828; Kate Newhall 971-673-0786

Brad Avakian on Latest Oregon Unemployment Numbers

Labor Commissioner comments on unemployment rate, BOLI's challenges, opportunities

PORTLAND, OR- Today, the Oregon Employment Department released its latest unemployment figures – 10.8% of Oregon's workforce is unemployed, up from 9.8% as reported in January. Moreover, there is a sizeable population of "discouraged workers" who are unemployed and not actively seeking work, and the numbers do not account for individuals who are underemployed. Rural Oregon communities have seen some of the most severe impacts.

BOLI is experiencing the impact of the rising unemployment first-hand: for example, wage claims have increased 10% and calls to BOLI's Wage and Hour Division are up similarly. Moreover, BOLI's Technical Assistance for Employers (TA) program has experienced a steady increase in calls and e-mails. Although TA is a strong resource for Oregon businesses, where BOLI trainers help employers comply with Oregon labor and employment laws, in these difficult times roughly one third of the inquiries the staff receives are from employers asking about layoffs.

State Labor Commissioner Brad Avakian notes that despite the difficult circumstances faced by many Oregonians, there is also a great opportunity to be had.

"Times are tough here in Oregon, but we have a real opportunity to get our state moving in the right direction," said Commissioner Avakian. "If we make smart investments now, particularly in job creation, education, and workforce apprenticeship programs, we can put Oregonians back to work and ensure that workers are prepared with the skills to obtain the high-wage, high demand jobs of the future."

At BOLI, the Apprenticeship and Training Division (ATD) is hard at work to do just that through its promotion quality apprenticeship programs. ATD helps students, working men and women, and returning veterans find and join these quality apprenticeship programs so they can earn a salary and receive post-secondary education while preparing themselves for a dynamic career in a wide number of skilled trades.

"As our economy begins to come around and the federal stimulus dollars reach Oregon, there will be a need for well-trained apprentices from quality programs," Commissioner Avakian noted. "At BOLI, we are seizing this opportunity and helping to stimulate our state's workforce by working with nearly 8,000 Oregon apprentices who are training to be journeymen in various trades. There is no doubt about the challenging times ahead, but we know a skilled and ready workforce will be a critical component of strengthening the Oregon economy."

For more information about BOLI and its Apprenticeship and Training Division, [click here](#).

#####

The mission of the Bureau of Labor and Industries is to protect employment rights, advance employment opportunities, and protect access to housing and public accommodations free from discrimination.