

THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



578 Getting Ready For Unemployment Benefits – Update

I had another conversation with Dave Dell'Isola of the Department of Labor, and there's more to report. I'm Jerry Roberts and today, an update on where DOL is with the unemployment system, and what we need now to prepare for its launch. That's next on The Extra Point.

We've spoken twice with Dave Dell'Isola, the director of Guam's Department of Labor, and those discussions have resulted in Extra Points #562 and #574, both of which you can download from our site, guamtraining.com.

A quick recap. You can now earn up to \$494.00 per week and still qualify for the basic unemployment benefit, which is up to \$345.00 weekly. As long as you qualify for at least \$1.00 of unemployment, the second federal benefit is added, another \$600.00 per week for the first 13 weeks.

It's all based on the premise that you have been impacted by the COVID-19 situation; you either lost your job, had hours reduced, or applied for a position and weren't hired due to virus-related health and economic concerns.

The rules state you can't quit a job in order to get unemployment. Further, if your employer offers you work you can't turn it down because the unemployment looks more attractive. Your pay cannot be reduced to help you qualify, but your hours can be reduced for that purpose.

Now, my call with Dave yesterday. Procurement and an agreement with the software vendor is done. However, there are other procurement issues which have to be handled. They're not major but there is a process that needs to be followed and he is doing that. If not, he would open himself and his department up to criticism and he's not going to do that.

Dave also mentioned that DOL has reached agreement with the FSM Consulate to process all applications for Micronesian citizens.

The software system is getting closer to being final. However, there's no sense in releasing the application before complete testing to make sure it operates correctly.

The idea is for you to enter your social security number, have the system immediately tie you to your employer, then walk you through the steps needed to file your claim. Once finished, you'll be set up for payment. That brings us to Dave's key point.

He stressed several times the importance that as many people as possible have a bank account and allow the system to direct deposit the funds. There are two major reasons for this. One, the money comes out faster. If DOL has to get a check printed and mailed, you'll wait while other people already have their money.

The second reason is for your safety. The first payment will be retroactive and will cover the weeks you've missed while the program was setting up. This will result in people receiving checks perhaps as large as \$7-8,000.00.

If you don't have a bank account where will you cash a check that size? More important, do you want to carry that kind of cash around, making you a target for those who would rob you?

Dave also referred to the phone and online scams that are targeting pandemic unemployment recipients. We've had those in Guam in the past and we'll see them come around again once the money begins to be distributed. Again, this is reason to have a bank account. If you don't have one, visit a nearby financial institution and get information on how to set one up.

We're closer to the online unemployment system being operational but it's not here yet. Dave says that everybody at DOL knows how anxious people are.

(Con't.)

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Let's not forget, the majority of those people have relatives who have lost their jobs or had hours reduced, and who are counting on unemployment to carry them through this rough and unpredictable time.

Looking to the near future, the next wave of the stimulus effort has been approved the House of Representatives and is in front of the Senate, where it will be defeated, setting up the usual heated negotiations where both sides will paint the other as irresponsible, before reaching an agreement.

The reason I bring it up is that included in this legislation is a clause that will extend that second part of the pandemic compensation, the \$600.00 per week.

If approved, it will continue through the end of the year. That will add approximately \$16,000.00 to the wallets and purses of unemployment recipients.

Last point. Download this program, #578, along with the other two mentioned, print them out and I recommend you create a folder for all information you pick up from now on that relates to the unemployment system.

You also need to have a plan for the money. Not just how to spend it but also to put a chunk away to cover taxes. Yes, unemployment funds are taxed. If you end up spending all of yours, it's not going to be any fun next April when you'll need to come up with money to cover your 2020 income tax return.

I suggest you put away about 20% for that purpose. That way, you avoid trouble.

We'll keep you up to date on further details as they become available. Dave Dell'Isola hopes to have some very good news to share in the coming week. That's all he could say.

That's The Extra Point. Be responsible and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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