

# **Trade and Globalization**

**(Adjustment for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Workforce)**

**June 6, 2007**

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My name is Jerry Ross. I live in Eureka, Montana, located in the northwestern corner of the state, 7 miles south of the Canadian border. I worked for Owens & Hurst Lumber Mill Inc. for over 13 years, which produced lumber products. I worked as a supervisor in the plant.

In the early months of 2005 it was announced the mill was forced to close its doors after 25 years of business due to the result of competition from foreign trade.

With the uncertainty of what lay ahead for the future decisions would have to be made. Where would work be found? Would it be possible to earn enough money to make a living in the immediate area? Would moving out of the area be necessary?

Thru the Job Service a federal program, **Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA)** was offered to the 87 affected employees. The employees were issued a Grant under the **Northwestern Montana Timber National Emergency Grant. (NEG)** The NEG is a grant that provides funds for other needed items that the TAA and the TRA may not cover. The grant is presented by the State of Montana to the US Department of Labor. If the grant is approved then a specified amount of funding is made available for retraining and supportive services.

I chose a 2-year program in the Building Trades, and Accounting Technology offered at Flathead Valley Community College. The TAA program has provided Unemployment benefits and gas allotment for the 150 miles I drive daily roundtrip to attend school. All my books, tuition, and required materials have been paid for. I cannot say enough good things about the program. It has been dreams come true for me to attend college.

The staff at the Job Service has been exceptionally helpful. They have taken the time with each worker to explain the options available. I know I can contact my caseworker with any questions I may have and that she is quick to respond with the options available.

I do have a few suggestions for improvement to the TAA and the TRA programs listed below.

#### SUGGESTIONS FOR CHANGE:

##### A.) Time Issue:

1. There are time limits set forth to be enrolled in a qualified training program.
2. The end of 8 weeks in which the petition is certified, or the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> week after the job separation.
3. Perhaps more time is needed to decide what the individual would like to do.

4. There are limited training facilities in rural Montana and most training institutions do not have open enrollment. Students can only start training at each semester and not usually within the 8/16-week deadline.

**B.) Health Insurance:**

1. Has the Health Coverage Tax Credit (HCTC) been working?
2. There needs to be improvement for this process. 65% of a tax credit is still not enough.
3. What is needed is some form of health insurance. Either something affordable or some type of insurance for the trainee and their family while they are in training. Currently there is one man in his 30's who has been in the program for 2 years. His kidneys are failing. He has no insurance and he is starting dialysis as we speak. He has a wife and 2 children.

**C.) Unemployment/TRA Benefits:**

1. Make sure these benefits do not run out before the training is completed.
2. It would be difficult to finish the training without financial support.
3. Because of college start dates, participants cannot start training as soon as they are laid off. They use their unemployment during this time of waiting which means those weeks are not available at the end of the 104 weeks of training.

**D.) Childcare:**

1. There were several young families involved with this lay-off who have small children. While in training, the young men who are the bread winners are not bringing home the same amount of finances into the household. Childcare is still needed while they are in training. Some sort of aid in this area would be helpful.

**E.) Rural Areas:**

1. It is hard for workers in rural areas to access training. The Owens & Hurst workers had to drive over 100 miles every day to get to the closest Community College. It would be nice to have a little more flexibility to pursue legitimate on-line training opportunities.

**F.) Half of the Federal Per Diem Rate Limit**

1. While most people can eat modestly for \$22/day, it is almost impossible to find a motel for \$36.50/night in the off-season in Kalispell, Montana. (Federal Per Diem rates for Kalispell September to May are \$73/lodging and \$44/meals; TAA can only pay 50% of that rate for training.)

**G.) ATAA Deadline (Wage Insurance):**

1. To qualify for ATAA a worker must obtain qualifying reemployment within 26 weeks of layoff. This remains true even if the certification is not issued until after the 26-week has passed. We had a Washington employer who did not apply for TAA until after the 26 weeks because they hoped to start back up again, so all

their workers WERE NOT eligible for ATAA. This was due to the fact the employer did not file in time. The deadline should be 26 weeks of layoff or petition being approved, which ever is later.

In conclusion, I want to once again state how pleased I have been with the training offered to me. It has been a life-changing event. We do not have the opportunities that larger areas present; with a few adjustments I believe the TAA and the TRA programs can be made better. I would like to personally thank-you for providing these programs to dislocated workers as myself who have suffered job losses due to foreign trade. This brings hope not only to our future but also for the future of our nation. This allows us the opportunity to once again to be part of our nation's work force.

Respectfully,

Jerry Ann Ross