

News from U.S. Rep. John Spratt (D-SC)

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US House of Representatives – Washington, DC

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Spratt Announces Approval of Trade Benefits for Springs Workers

WASHINGTON — U.S. Rep. John Spratt (D-SC) announced today that the U.S. Department of Labor has approved the Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) petition filed by Springs Industries, making Springs workers eligible for TAA benefits. These benefits will be made available for workers who were employed at the White Plant in Fort Mill, and the Lancaster Plant in Lancaster, as well as employees cut from the workforce at the Grace Fabrication Plant in Lancaster.

“I am pleased that the Labor Department has approved this petition swiftly and made these benefits available,” said Spratt. “I hope that these benefits will cushion the blow and help build a bridge to the future for those who have lost their jobs.”

Springs Industries will file another petition shortly for the workers who will be affected by the December 1 closings of the Leroy Plant in Fort Lawn, S.C., and the Springfield Plant in Laurel Hill, N.C.

The Trade Adjustment Assistance program offers benefits, including job retraining, to workers displaced by imports or a shift of production to other countries. Once a laid-off worker has exhausted state unemployment benefits, he or she can qualify to receive supplemental benefits under TAA. These include weekly cash payments equal to unemployment benefits. To qualify, the worker must be involved in job re-training. TAA payments can last for 52 weeks if a worker is in job training and 26 weeks more if a worker needs remedial education.

The job training requirement can be waived if any one of the following six grounds for waiver is demonstrated:

1. The worker is recalled by the firm from which he or she was laid-off.
2. The worker already has marketable skills for suitable employment and has reason to expect employment at equivalent wages in the foreseeable future.

3. The worker is within 2 years of retiring and meets all requirements either under Social Security or a private pension sponsored by an employer or labor organization.
4. The worker is unable to participate in training due to his or her health.
5. The worker is unable to get job retraining because immediate enrollment is unavailable.
6. The worker is unable to find approved training from either government or private sources, or no suitable training is available at a reasonable cost, or no training funds are available

In addition to cash payments, TAA provides:

Health Care Tax Credit: Claimants certified for TAA after August 6, 2003, qualify for a tax credit paid every month that covers 65% of their medical insurance premiums. The tax credit is available as soon as a worker qualifies for the TAA program, even though the worker is still drawing unemployment insurance, and has not begun receiving cash benefits under TAA.

Older Workers Program: Older workers can qualify for an alternative TAA program, which restores 50% of the difference (up to \$10,000) between the wage they earned at Springs and the lower wage they earn at a new job. Such workers must be over 50 years of age and must have incomes of less than \$50,000 a year. They must work full time, and must find their new jobs within 26 weeks after losing their old jobs. There is a time limit of two years to this benefit.

Commuters: Up to \$1250 allowance can be paid by the TAA programs for the expenses of eligible claimants who must search for work outside their regular commuting areas.

Relocation Expenses: A stipend equal to three weeks pay at the previous job or \$1250, whichever is less, is available to apply toward the moving costs of claimants who must relocate to find work. In addition, the U.S. Department of Labor will reimburse up to 90% of reasonable costs incurred to change locations.

Workforce Investment Act

The federal Workforce Investment Act is another avenue for retraining unemployed workers. It will pay tuition and other expenses connected with retraining. The State Employment Office can provide additional information and assistance on entering this program.

Trade Adjustment Assistance Benefits will be administered by the South Carolina Employment Security Commission. The Human Resource Department at Springs will provide more detailed information on how and where to apply for TAA benefits.

“My staff and I stand ready to offer any assistance we can to see that eligibility for benefits is processed quickly and efficiently,” Spratt said.

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