Unemployed face cutoff of extended benefits

BATON ROUGE — The Extended Benefits program, which allows unemployment insurance claimants as many as 13 additional weeks of benefits after they exhaust regular benefits of up to 26 weeks, will end March 14, the Department of Labor announced Monday, March 9.

Although the Baton Rouge office was unable to tell the Gazette how many Evangeline Parish residents would be affected by the action, a total of 22,459 claimants are being notified individually that their extended benefits have been terminated.

The state no longer qualifies for the federal program which allows additional weeks of benefits. Prior to the March 14 cutoff, department officials reported Louisiana and Alaska were the only two remaining states on the Extended Benefits program. Under the program, the federal government provided half of the benefits, while employers in the state supplied the remaining half.

“The federal guidelines require an insured unemployment rate of 5 percent, as well as a rate of at least 120 percent above the average for the past two years,” said Secretary of Labor Gayle F. Truax.

Although we have an insured rate of 5.6 percent, we no longer meet the 120 percent federal requirement and must trigger off Extended Benefits,” she added.

When a state ‘triggers’ off Extended Benefits, it must remain off for at least 13 weeks and until it again meets federal guidelines.

When contacted by the Gazette, Labor Department officials explained that a person with a regular claim with a “benefit year” ending date which falls within the next qualified Extended Benefit period, will be eligible for the extended benefits during that period, if the state requalifies. However, claimants whose ending date falls within the next 13, noneligible weeks will not be qualified for Extended Benefits, unless they can establish a regular claim under a different plan.