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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Contact:  
Tommy Merritt  
Phone: 903-238-9100**

## **MERRITT ANNOUNCES EXPEDITED EXTENDED UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS FOR ELIGIBLE TEXANS**

Austin - Rep. Tommy Merritt announced today that the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) will begin paying benefits to jobless Texans who qualify for 13 weeks of state extended benefits by the end of July. TWC will send letters to claimants beginning July 24, 2009 with instructions on how to file for the new extension.

TWC worked with the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) to expedite payments for eligible Texans after realizing it would have taken months to reprogram computers to address the extensive eligibility and reporting requirements. The Texas Legislature worked to change the law to allow for state extended benefits during the recent regular session that ended June 1.

"I commend the Workforce Commission for finding a way to get these funds to people who really need it more quickly," Rep. Merritt stated. "Their efforts will prevent what could have been months of delay in making this money available."

This 13-week state extension is available to claimants who have exhausted 59 weeks of unemployment benefits. TWC estimates that as many as 100,000 claimants could exhaust their unemployment benefits by November 2009 and may be eligible for the new extension.

TWC call centers are available Monday through Friday, 7am to 7pm for all unemployment services. People may call in on Saturday and Sundays from 9am to 1pm to request new claims, reset PINs and make address changes only. The toll-free number is 1-800-939-6631. Deaf, hard-of-hearing or speech impaired customers may contact Relay Texas: 1-800-735-2989 (TDD) and 711 (Voice).

Rep. Merritt is Chairman of the House Committee on Public Safety and serves on the House Committees on Transportation, Local & Consent Calendars and Redistricting. He represents Gregg County and northern Smith County to include Winona, Lindale and Hideaway Lake.

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