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# State program keeps laid-off workers working

By Matt Markovich

## Summary

It used to be when you're collecting unemployment benefits and got a part-time job, those benefits would most likely be cut. But that's no longer the case under a state's alternative program.

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SEATTLE — Tracy Thurman was laid off last March.

But the union machinist is still working, earning \$25 an hour while also collecting unemployment at the same time.

"It means that I get to keep my job and I get to keep all my health benefits," she said.

Mike Bowman, who was also laid off, is also still working.

That's because their employer, Gear Works, avoided huge layoffs by signing on with state's Shared Work program.

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"One week we are busy, they need work done. We can work 40 hours and not collect unemployment. The next week, we can be cut that fifth day and we collect unemployment. It's excellent, because you always have somewhat of a consistent paycheck and not have to worry!" Bowman said.

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have to worry," Bowman said.

It used to be when you're collecting unemployment benefits and got a part-time job, those benefits would most likely be cut. But that's no longer the case under this alternative program.

Shared Work lets employers reduce the hours of full-time employees by up to 50 percent. And workers can collect unemployment checks to make up part of the difference. Only hourly employees are eligible.

The program has grown eight fold in the past year, from 5,700 to 42,000 employees, and more than 2,000 companies have joined statewide.

"And we have 130,000 drawing unemployment insurance. So that tells you its a big percentage of the claims we have out there," said Karen Lee of Washington Employment Security

Gear Works makes large, specialized industrial gears. When the economy tanked, so did its orders. But the company didn't want to lose its skilled workforce, so it turned to Shared Work.

"It's not a long-term strategy; it's a bridge to get us through this period," said Sterling Ramberg, Gear Works president and co-founder.

As a result of the program, the company was able to cut its payroll without losing workers. And the employees can also stay afloat with two checks.

It's an unemployment program that keeps people working.



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