

Fifty-sixth Legislative Assembly, State of North Dakota, begun in the Capitol in the City of Bismarck, on Tuesday, the fifth day of January, one thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine

HOUSE BILL NO. 1135
(Industry, Business and Labor Committee)
(At the request of Job Service North Dakota)

AN ACT to amend and reenact sections 52-04-05, 52-04-06, 52-04-09, and 52-06-05 of the North Dakota Century Code, relating to the required level of the unemployment compensation trust fund reserve, employer contribution rates, and maximum potential benefits.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF NORTH DAKOTA:

SECTION 1. AMENDMENT. Section 52-04-05 of the 1997 Supplement to the North Dakota Century Code is amended and reenacted as follows:

52-04-05. (Effective through December 31, ~~2000~~ 1999) Determination of rates.

1. For each calendar year, the bureau shall estimate the amount of income needed to pay benefits and maintain a balance in the unemployment compensation fund, that as of October 1, 1989, is equal to twenty-five percent of the average annual amount of benefits paid. On each October first after October 1, 1989, the amount of the trust fund reserve must be sixty percent of the average annual amount of benefits paid. The average annual amount of benefits paid must be computed by dividing the total amount of benefits paid and projected to be paid during the previous thirty-six months by three. On January 1, 2000, the required amount of the trust fund reserve becomes a targeted amount as determined under this subsection. The solvency target is an average high cost multiple of one. The average high cost multiple is the number of years the bureau could pay unemployment compensation, based on the reserve ratio, if the bureau paid the compensation at a rate equivalent to the average benefit cost rate in the one calendar year during the preceding twenty calendar years and the two calendar years during the preceding ten calendar years in which the benefit cost rates were the highest. "Reserve ratio" means the ratio determined by dividing the balance in the trust fund reserve at the end of the calendar year by the total covered wages in the state for that year. "Benefit cost rate" means the rate determined by dividing the unemployment compensation benefits paid during a calendar year by the total covered wages in the state for that year. The computation of the reserve ratio and benefit cost rate must exclude the wages and unemployment compensation paid by employers covered under section 3309 of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, as amended, [26 U.S.C. 3309]. The trust fund reserve target will be achieved over a seven-year period from January 1, 2000. Progress toward achieving the targeted amount of the trust fund reserve is measured by reducing any difference between one and the average high-cost multiple of the state by an amount that is at least equal to the ratio of the number of years left to reach the targeted amount of the trust fund reserve to the difference between the trust fund reserve and the targeted amount. If the calendar year annual average insured unemployment rate is above three percent and has increased one hundred ten percent of the average of the preceding two calendar years, a tax rate will be set to provide for fifty percent of the additional revenue needed for the trust fund to be derived from tax rate increases and the remaining fifty percent becomes a drawdown against the trust fund reserve. In setting tax rates, the amount of the trust fund reserve may not be allowed to fall below three hundred percent from a standard margin of error for the targeted amount of the trust fund reserve. The executive director may make reasonable adjustments to the tax rates set for a calendar year to prevent significant rate variations between calendar years. When the trust fund reserve is being rebuilt, rates will not be lowered until the target level is reached. If while achieving the trust fund reserve target the trigger of above three percent insured unemployment rate and an increase of more than one hundred ten percent of the average

of the two preceding years has been in effect for two or more consecutive years, the period of time to achieve the trust fund reserve target is extended to seven years from the end date of the last year in which the trigger was in effect. If this trigger has been in effect for one year, the amount of tax increase towards achieving the targeted amount of the trust fund reserve must be determined using the number of years remaining of the seven-year period, excluding the year the trigger is in effect.

2. Rates must be determined as follows:

- a. The income required for the calendar year must be divided by the estimated taxable wages for the calendar year. The result rounded to the next higher one one-hundredth of one percent is the average required rate.
- b. ~~The minimum rate for each calendar year is the average required rate, multiplied by one fourth, rounded to the nearest one-tenth of one percent. If the positive employer maximum rate is at least one percent, the positive employer minimum rate is the positive employer maximum rate minus nine-tenths of one percent. If the positive employer maximum rate is less than one percent, the range for the positive employer minimum rate must be at least one-tenth of one percent and must be less than two-tenths of one percent (the minimum of one-tenth of one percent plus the increment of one-tenth of one percent), with the positive employer minimum rate equal to the positive employer maximum rate minus a multiple of the increment one-tenth of one percent as provided in subsection 2 of section 52-04-06 to fall within the range described above. Within the table of rate schedules for each calendar year, a rate schedule may not be used if it would generate less income than any rate schedule preceding it on the table of rate schedules. The negative employer minimum rate is the positive employer maximum rate plus five and one-tenth percent.~~
- c. ~~The maximum rate for each calendar year is the average required rate, multiplied by three, rounded to the nearest one-tenth of one percent. The positive employer maximum rate must be set so that all the rates combined generate the average required rate. The negative employer maximum rate is the negative employer minimum rate plus three and six-tenths percent. However, the maximum rate must be at least five and four-tenths percent.~~

3. a. Except as otherwise provided in this subsection, an employer's rate may not be less than the ~~maximum~~ negative employer minimum rate for a calendar year unless the employer's account has been chargeable with benefits throughout the thirty-six-consecutive-calendar-month period ending on September thirtieth of the preceding calendar year. If an employer in construction services has not been subject to the law as required, that employer qualifies for a reduced rate if the account has been chargeable with benefits throughout the twenty-four-consecutive-calendar-month period ending September thirtieth of the preceding calendar year. ~~However, an employer in construction services must be assigned the maximum rate or seven percent, whichever is greater, for any year if, as of the computation date, the cumulative benefits charged to the employer's account equal or exceed the cumulative contributions paid on or before October thirty first with respect to wages paid by that employer before October first of that year.~~ An employer identified as belonging to industry group number 161, highway and street construction, except elevated highways, provided in the standard industrial classification manual, must be assigned a ~~maximum rate or eight and one-half percent, whichever is greater,~~ within the negative employer rate ranges with an additional one and one-half percent added to the rate for any year if, as of the computation date, the cumulative benefits charged to the employer's account equal or exceed the cumulative contributions paid on or before October thirty-first of that year. If an employer in nonconstruction services has not been subject to the law as required, the employer in nonconstruction services qualifies for a reduced rate if the account has been chargeable with benefits throughout the twelve-consecutive-calendar-month period ending September thirtieth of the

preceding calendar year. During the building of the trust fund reserve, the rate assigned to an employer may not exceed one hundred thirty percent of the previous year's rate for that employer and an employer may not receive more than a ten percent decrease in that employer's rate from the previous year's tax rate, for the calendar years 2000, 2001, and 2002. The executive director may provide any negative employer whose contributions paid into the trust fund are greater than the benefit charges against that employer's account, for a minimum of three consecutive years immediately preceding the computation date or subject to the law as required, with up to a thirty percent reduction to that employer's rate for any year if that employer has in place a plan approved by the bureau which addresses substantive changes to that employer's business operation and ensures that any rate reduction provided will not put the employer account back into a negative status.

- b. An employer that does not qualify under subdivision a is subject to a rate determined as follows:
 - (1) For each calendar year new employers must be assigned a rate that is one hundred fifty percent of ~~two and two tenths percent~~ the positive employer maximum rate or a rate of one percent, whichever is greater, unless the employer is classified in construction services. However, an employer must be assigned ~~the maximum rate~~ within the negative employer rate ranges for any year if, as of the computation date, the cumulative benefits charged to that employer's account equal or exceed the cumulative contributions paid on or before October thirty-first with respect to wages paid by that employer before October first of that year.
 - (2) New employers in construction services must be assigned ~~a rate of seven percent or the maximum rate, whichever is greater~~ the negative employer maximum rate.
 - (3) Assignment by the bureau of an employer's industrial classification for the purposes of this section must be the two digit major group provided in the standard industrial classification manual, in accordance with established classification practices found in the standard industrial classification manual issued by the executive office of the president, office of management and budget.
4. An employer who has ceased to be liable for contributions shall continue its established experience rating account if it again becomes liable within three years from the date that it ceased to be liable. Such employer's rate, however, must be determined in accordance with subsection 3.

(Effective after December 31, ~~2000~~ 1999) Determination of rates.

1. For each calendar year, the bureau shall estimate the amount of income needed to pay benefits and maintain a balance in the unemployment compensation fund, that as of October 1, 1989, is equal to twenty-five percent of the average annual amount of benefits paid. On each October first after October 1, 1989, the amount of the trust fund reserve must be sixty percent of the average annual amount of benefits paid. The average annual amount of benefits paid must be computed by dividing the total amount of benefits paid and projected to be paid during the previous thirty-six months by three. On January 1, 2000, the required amount of the trust fund reserve becomes a targeted amount as determined under this subsection. The solvency target is an average high cost multiple of one. The average high cost multiple is the number of years the bureau could pay unemployment compensation, based on the reserve ratio, if the bureau paid the compensation at a rate equivalent to the average benefit cost rate in the one calendar year during the preceding twenty calendar years and the two calendar years during the preceding ten calendar years in which the benefit cost rates were the highest. "Reserve ratio" means the ratio determined by dividing the balance in the trust fund reserve at the end of the calendar year by the total covered wages in the state for that year. "Benefit cost

rate" means the rate determined by dividing the unemployment compensation benefits paid during a calendar year by the total covered wages in the state for that year. The computation of the reserve ratio and benefit cost rate must exclude the wages and unemployment compensation paid by employers covered under section 3309 of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, as amended, [26 U.S.C. 3309]. The trust fund reserve target will be achieved over a seven-year period from January 1, 2000. Progress toward achieving the targeted amount of the trust fund reserve is measured by reducing any difference between one and the average high-cost multiple of the state by an amount that is at least equal to the ratio of the number of years left to reach the targeted amount of the trust fund reserve to the difference between the trust fund reserve and the targeted amount. If the calendar year annual average insured unemployment rate is above three percent and has increased one hundred ten percent of the average of the preceding two calendar years, a tax rate will be set to provide for fifty percent of the additional revenue needed for the trust fund to be derived from tax rate increases and the remaining fifty percent becomes a drawdown against the trust fund reserve. In setting tax rates, the amount of the trust fund reserve may not be allowed to fall below three hundred percent from a standard margin of error for the targeted amount of the trust fund reserve. The executive director may make reasonable adjustments to the tax rates set for a calendar year to prevent significant rate variations between calendar years. When the trust fund reserve is being rebuilt, rates will not be lowered until the target level is reached. If while achieving the trust fund reserve target the trigger of above three percent insured unemployment rate and an increase of more than one hundred ten percent of the average of the two preceding years has been in effect for two or more consecutive years, the period of time to achieve the trust fund reserve target is extended to seven years from the end date of the last year in which the trigger was in effect. If this trigger has been in effect for one year, the amount of tax increase towards achieving the targeted amount of the trust fund reserve must be determined using the number of years remaining of the seven-year period, excluding the year the trigger is in effect.

2. Rates must be determined as follows:

- a. The income required for the calendar year must be divided by the estimated taxable wages for the calendar year. The result rounded to the next higher one one-hundredth of one percent is the average required rate.
- b. The minimum rate for each calendar year is the average required rate, multiplied by one-fourth, rounded to the nearest one-tenth of one percent. If the positive employer maximum rate is at least one percent, the positive employer minimum rate is the positive employer maximum rate minus nine-tenths of one percent. If the positive employer maximum rate is less than one percent, the range for the positive employer minimum rate must be at least one-tenth of one percent and must be less than two-tenths of one percent (the minimum of one-tenth of one percent plus the increment of one-tenth of one percent), with the positive employer minimum rate equal to the positive employer maximum rate minus a multiple of the increment one-tenth of one percent as provided in subsection 2 of section 52-04-06 to fall within the range described above. Within the table of rate schedules for each calendar year, a rate schedule may not be used if it would generate less income than any rate schedule preceding it on the table of rate schedules. The negative employer minimum rate is the positive employer maximum rate plus five and one-tenth percent.
- c. The maximum rate for each calendar year is the average required rate, multiplied by three, rounded to the nearest one-tenth of one percent. The positive employer maximum rate must be set so that all the rates combined generate the average required rate. The negative employer maximum rate is the negative employer minimum rate plus three and six-tenths percent. However, the maximum rate must be at least five and four-tenths percent.

3. a. Except as otherwise provided in this subsection, an employer's rate may not be less than the ~~maximum~~ negative employer minimum rate for a calendar year unless the

employer's account has been chargeable with benefits throughout the thirty-six-consecutive-calendar-month period ending on September thirtieth of the preceding calendar year. If an employer in construction services has not been subject to the law as required, that employer qualifies for a reduced rate if the account has been chargeable with benefits throughout the twenty-four-consecutive-calendar-month period ending September thirtieth of the preceding calendar year. ~~However, an employer in construction services must be assigned the maximum rate or seven percent, whichever is greater, for any year if, as of the computation date, the cumulative benefits charged to the employer's account equal or exceed the cumulative contributions paid on or before October thirty first with respect to wages paid by that employer before October first of that year.~~ If an employer in nonconstruction services has not been subject to the law as required, the employer in nonconstruction services qualifies for a reduced rate if the account has been chargeable with benefits throughout the twelve-consecutive-calendar-month period ending September thirtieth of the preceding calendar year. During the building of the trust fund reserve, the rate assigned to an employer may not exceed one hundred thirty percent of the previous year's rate for that employer and an employer may not receive more than a ten percent decrease in that employer's rate from the previous year's rate, for the calendar years 2000, 2001, and 2002. The executive director may provide any negative employer whose contributions paid into the trust fund are greater than the benefit charges against that employer's account, for a minimum of three consecutive years immediately preceding the computation date or subject to the law as required, with up to a thirty percent reduction to that employer's rate for any year if that employer has in place a plan approved by the bureau which addresses substantive changes to that employer's business operation and ensures that any rate reduction provided will not put the employer account back into a negative status.

- b. An employer that does not qualify under subdivision a is subject to a rate determined as follows:
- (1) For each calendar year new employers must be assigned a rate that is one hundred fifty percent of two and two tenths percent the positive employer maximum rate or a rate of one percent, whichever is greater, unless the employer is classified in construction services. However, an employer must be assigned the maximum rate within the negative employer rate ranges for any year if, as of the computation date, the cumulative benefits charged to that employer's account equal or exceed the cumulative contributions paid on or before October thirty-first with respect to wages paid by that employer before October first of that year.
 - (2) New employers in construction services must be assigned a rate of seven percent or the maximum rate, whichever is greater the negative employer maximum rate.
 - (3) Assignment by the bureau of an employer's industrial classification for the purposes of this section must be the two digit major group provided in the standard industrial classification manual, in accordance with established classification practices found in the standard industrial classification manual issued by the executive office of the president, office of management and budget.
4. An employer who has ceased to be liable for contributions shall continue its established experience rating account if it again becomes liable within three years from the date that it ceased to be liable. Such employer's rate, however, must be determined in accordance with subsection 3.

SECTION 2. AMENDMENT. Section 52-04-06 of the 1997 Supplement to the North Dakota Century Code is amended and reenacted as follows:

52-04-06. Variations in standard rate of contributions - How determined.

1. All employers eligible for an experience rate computation must be ranked in descending order by their reserve ratios. An employer's reserve ratio is the percentage of the average annual payroll by which the difference between the cumulative six-year contributions paid by that employer on or before October thirty-first of any year, with respect to wages paid by that employer before October first of that same year, exceeds and the cumulative six-year benefits charged to that employer's account before October first of that year, divided by the average annual payroll. Employers whose cumulative contributions exceed cumulative benefits must be assigned within the positive employer rate groups. Employers whose cumulative contributions are equal to or less than cumulative benefits must be assigned within the negative employer rate groups.
2. For each calendar year the bureau shall establish a schedule of rates, with the minimum rate determined under section 52-04-05 assigned to the first rate group. Each successive rate group must be assigned a rate equal to the previous group's rate plus two tenths of one percent. The number of rate groups in the schedule must be the number required to provide for a rate group at each two tenths of one percent interval between the minimum rate and two and one fourth times the average required rate determined under section 52-04-05. For each calendar year the bureau shall establish a schedule of positive employer rate groups within the positive employer minimum rate and the positive employer maximum rate determined under section 52-04-05. Each successive rate group for positive employer rate groups must be assigned a rate equal to the previous group's rate plus one-tenth of one percent. The number of rate groups in the positive employer schedule must be the number required to provide for a rate group at each one-tenth of one percent interval between the positive employer minimum rate and the positive employer maximum rate determined under section 52-04-05. For each calendar year the bureau shall establish a schedule of negative employer rate groups with the negative employer minimum rate and the negative employer maximum rate determined under section 52-04-05. Each successive rate group for negative employer rate groups must be assigned a rate equal to the previous group's rate plus four-tenths of one percent. The number of rate groups in the negative employer schedule must be the number required to provide for a rate group at each four-tenths of one percent interval between the negative employer minimum rate and the negative employer maximum rate determined under section 52-04-05.
3. Employers must be assigned to the groups in the rate schedule in the rank order of their reserve ratios, as determined in subsection 1, with the highest reserve ratio employers assigned to the first rate group. Each successively ranked employer must be assigned to the groups in the rate schedule so that those employers reporting seventy eight percent of the eligible employer's prior year's taxable wages are equally distributed in those rate groups at or below the average rate required of employers eligible for experience rating or the minimum rate group, whichever is greater, and twenty two percent of those wages are equally distributed in the remaining rate groups. Positive employers must be assigned to the rate in the positive employer rate schedule in the rank order of their reserve ratios, as determined in subsection 1, with the highest reserve ratio positive employers assigned to the first positive employer rate. Each successively ranked positive employer must be assigned to a rate within the positive employer rate schedule so that each rate within the rate schedule is assigned the same proportion of the positive employers prior year's taxable wages. Negative employers must be assigned to the rate in the negative employer rate schedule in the rank order of their reserve ratios, as determined in subsection 1, with the highest reserve ratio negative employers assigned to the first negative employer rate. Each successively ranked negative employer must be assigned to a rate within the negative employer rate schedule so that each rate within the rate schedule is assigned the same proportion of the negative employer's prior year's taxable wages.
4. The average rate of employers eligible for experience rating is determined as follows:

- ~~a.~~ ~~The estimated amount of taxes to be paid each year by employers not eligible for experience rating must be subtracted from the total required income for the year determined under section 52-04-05.~~
 - ~~b.~~ ~~The remainder must be divided by the estimated taxable wages of those employers eligible for experience rating, with the result rounded to the nearest one-tenth of one percent.~~
- ~~5.~~ After each year's rate schedule has been established, an employer may pay into the fund an amount in excess of the contributions required to be paid under this section. That amount must be credited to the employer's separate account. The employer's rate must be recomputed with the amount included in the calculation only if that amount was paid by April thirtieth of that year. Payments may not be refunded or used as credit in the payment of contributions.
 - ~~6.~~ 5. In the bureau's determination of the projected income requirements for computing contribution rates and taxable wage base, only the wages paid by, and the cost of benefits attributable to, tax-rated employers may be taken into account.
 - ~~7.~~ 6. If an employer has a quarterly taxable payroll in excess of fifty thousand dollars and at least three times its established average annual payroll, the tax rate for that employer is the negative employer maximum rate of contribution in effect that year, beginning the first day of the calendar quarter in which it occurred and for the remainder of the calendar year.

SECTION 3. AMENDMENT. Section 52-04-09 of the North Dakota Century Code is amended and reenacted as follows:

52-04-09. Classification of employers to determine contributions - Regulations governing. An employer's rate for a calendar year must be determined on the basis of the employer's experience with contribution payments and benefit charges as of October first of the preceding year. If when such determination is to be made an employer has failed to file a required report or filed an insufficient report, the bureau shall notify the employer thereof by certified mail addressed to the employer's last known address. Unless the employer files the report or a sufficient report within fifteen days after mailing of the notice, the employer's rate for the following calendar year may not be less than the negative employer maximum rate. For employers identified as belonging to industry group number 161, highway and street construction, except elevated highways, for the effective period set forth in section 52-04-05, the employer's rate for the following calendar year may not be less than the negative employer maximum rate plus one and one-half percent. If, at any time, an employer has failed to file a required report or filed an insufficient report, the bureau may, at any time, estimate the wage information required by the report on the basis of reasonably available evidence. The bureau shall notify the employer of the estimate by certified mail addressed to the employer's last known address. Unless the employer files the report or a sufficient report within fifteen days after the mailing of the notice, the estimate becomes final for all purposes, except that if the amount of estimated wages is less than the actual wages, the bureau may reconsider the estimate.

SECTION 4. AMENDMENT. Section 52-06-05 of the 1997 Supplement to the North Dakota Century Code is amended and reenacted as follows:

52-06-05. (Effective through December 31, 1999) Maximum potential benefits.

1. Except as provided in subsection 2, any otherwise eligible individual is entitled during the individual's benefit year to benefits for the number of times the individual's weekly benefit amount appearing in the following table on the line that includes the individual's ratio of total base-period wages to highest quarter base-period wages:

Ratio of Total Base-Period Wages to High Quarter	Times Weekly Benefit Amount
1.50 to 2.29	12
2.30 to 2.44	14
2.45 to 2.59	16

2.60 to 2.74	18
2.75 to 2.89	20
2.90 to 3.04	22
3.05 to 3.19	24
3.20 or more	26

2. Any otherwise eligible individual ~~whose entire~~ with at least sixty percent of that individual's base-period earnings ~~were~~ paid by an employer belonging to industry group number 161, highway and street construction, except elevated highways, pursuant to the standard industrial classification manual is entitled during the individual's benefit year to benefits for the number of times the individual's weekly benefit amount appearing in the following table on the line that includes the individual's ratio of total base-period wages to highest quarter base-period wages:

Ratio of Total Base-Period Wages to High Quarter	Times Weekly Benefit Amount
1.50 to 1.73	12
1.74 to 1.97	14
1.98 to 2.21	16
2.22 to 2.45	18
2.46 to 2.69	20
2.70 to 2.93	22
2.94 to 3.17	24
3.18 or more	26

(Effective after December 31, 1999) Maximum potential benefits. Any otherwise eligible individual is entitled during the individual's benefit year to benefits for the number of times the individual's weekly benefit amount appearing in the following table on the line which includes the individual's ratio of total base-period wages to highest quarter base-period wages:

Ratio of Total Base-Period Wages to High Quarter	Times Weekly Benefit Amount
1.50 to 2.29	12
2.30 to 2.44	14
2.45 to 2.59	16
2.60 to 2.74	18
2.75 to 2.89	20
2.90 to 3.04	22
3.05 to 3.19	24
3.20 or more	26

SECTION 5. JOB SERVICE NORTH DAKOTA - REPORT TO LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL - LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL RECOMMENDATIONS. During the 1999-2000 interim, job service North Dakota shall review possible incentives to encourage an employee to decrease the length of time that employee receives unemployment compensation benefits and to encourage a negative employer to become a positive employer and job service North Dakota shall report the results of this review to the legislative council. The legislative council shall report its recommendations, together with any legislation required to implement the recommendations, to the fifty-seventh legislative assembly.

Speaker of the House

President of the Senate

Chief Clerk of the House

Secretary of the Senate

This certifies that the within bill originated in the House of Representatives of the Fifty-sixth Legislative Assembly of North Dakota and is known on the records of that body as House Bill No. 1135.

House Vote: Yeas 95 Nays 0 Absent 3

Senate Vote: Yeas 48 Nays 0 Absent 1

Chief Clerk of the House

Received by the Governor at _____ M. on _____, 1999.

Approved at _____ M. on _____, 1999.

Governor

Filed in this office this _____ day of _____, 1999,

at _____ o'clock _____ M.

Secretary of State