GOP bill would curb unemployment comp costs

Republicans in the state Legis-lature placed a bill curbing unem-ployment compensation costs on a fast track for passage this

"Railroad" "shouted Democrat"Railroad" "shouted Democratic Sen. George Z. Hart of Dearbern as Republicans on the Sonate Labor Committee Tuesday
agwa 2 to 2 approval to an employer-backed bill.
"I don't think were taking
marching orders," replied chairman David Honigman, R. West
Bloomfield. "I introduced this
same bill eight years ago when I
was a freshman."
Supporting the bill were ReSupporting the bill were Re-

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Supporting the bill were Re
publicans Honigman, Robert
Geake of Northville and sponse,
Joanne Emmons of Big Rapids.
Opposed were Democrats Hart
and John Cherry of Clio.
GOP Senate leaders want to

LANSING

pass the bill this week, Honigman said. That would allow prompt action by the divided House whose committees in Feburary are chaired by Republicans. Otherwise, said Honigman, the bill might be delayed until April, the next month the GOP is in charge of House committees.

"Toledo is a great place. South Bend is a great place," Packer said, citing clients who had moved out. "Sea Ray Boats went from Oakland County to Tennes-

see.
"Every section of the (unem-ployment) act is unfavorable to employers except one." Packer said, declining to name the sec-tion.

Main features of SB 2:

"Waiting week" added. Laidoff workers would have to wait
one week before being eligible for
benefits, as in 39 other states.
Michigan removed the waiting
week in the mid-1970s.

"Wago ratio cut. The wage replacement ratio would be cut to
65 percent instead of 70 percent of
after-tax earnings.

Benefit "indexing" out. The Legislature would have to vote changes in benefits rather than indexing them to economic statis-

tics.

Qualifying amount up. Claimants would have to have carned 30 times the state minimum wage (versus the current 20 times) to be eligible for benefits.

Tough at bottom

Labor spokesmen and Democrats fired hardest at the waiting week provision. Business said it wouldn't reduce benefits — just delay them one week — and the maximum still would be 26 weeks.

wouldn't reduce benefits — just delay them one week — and the maximum still would be 28 weeks.

Sen. Cherry said the impact would be felt most by low-wage workers laid off for short periods. For a worker laid off two weeks, the cut would be 53 percent; for three weeks, 38 percent.

"Three weeks is the alverage layoff in the state," Cherry said. "To cut an \$30 a week benefit to \$40 is ridiculous."

Sen. Geake challenged labor's and the state's figures that \$81 2 would cut benefits by \$1.1 billion over six years, but save employers just \$171 million. "If the program is 100 percent employer-funded, it's not possible."

"Sure it is," asid United Auto Workers attorney Richard McHugh. The \$500 million difference would go into the state unemployment trust fund, he said.

Meffugh argued that consumers pump their jobless bene-

fits back into the economy, Cutting benefits and employers' taxes, he said, would drain more out
of the economy than it would put
back in.
"You espoused a very novel theory that taxation creates jobs,"
Sen. Honigman replied.
Honigman viewed unemployment compensation charges as a
tax on payrolis that impedes job
creation.
"A lot of Republicans would
want to repeal unemployment
compensation," said McHugh.
Honigman denied it.

Jobs lost
Questioned by sponsor Emmons, most lebor spokesmen said their unions' memberships had declined in the least decade.
John LaVallee, representing Iron Workers Local 783 in Marquette, said his membership is down from 400 five years age to 320 currently, and unemployment is currently abust 80 percent in the Upper Peninsula.
Tim Nichols, of the AFL-CIO Building Trades Council, said

membership is down 15,000 from five years ago to 100,000 current-ly.

Clarence Brogdon, of the Service Employees International Union in Detroit, said his local in down from 6,000 in 1982 to 1,450 currently.

"That's what I'm getting at," said Emmons. High benefits are "nice if you have a job, Is it not helpful to try to compete?"

"We've heard the words 'shared sacrifice'," said Tim Hughes of the state AFL-CIO. "I don't see it in here. You're punishing the victim."

Republicans, led by Gov. John Engler, contend Michigan must compete against other states for jobs in a global economy by hold-ing down business costs.

Labor spokesman almost never use the word "compete." They say \$2 an hour Mexican workers actining jobs south of the border, getting no benefits and having their environment polluted by costconsciours corporations.

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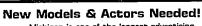




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