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Florida Lawmakers Approve Deep Cuts in Jobless Benefits

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — A bill that would establish some of the deepest and most far-reaching cuts in unemployment benefits in the nation is heading for the desk of Gov. [Rick Scott](#).

The Republican-controlled House and Senate passed the compromise measure just before the legislative session ended Friday night.

The legislation would cut maximum state benefits to 23 weeks from 26 when the jobless rate is 10.5 percent or higher.

If lower, the maximum would decline on a sliding scale until bottoming at 12 weeks if the jobless rate was 5 percent or less.

Both chambers were agreeable to a sliding scale, but the House wanted to cut the maximum to 20 weeks while the Senate wanted to keep it at 26.

The benefit reduction is expected to cut unemployment taxes paid by employers, but not until next year.

Florida has one of the highest unemployment rates in the country, 11.5 percent, and already had some

of the lowest unemployment benefits.

Critics called the legislation cruel and wrongheaded. But its supporters — including the bill's sponsor, Representative Doug Holder, Republican of Sarasota — argued that it was needed to help businesses and to aid job creation.

Mr. Holder had said earlier that the average amount of time people remain on unemployment in Florida was 17.7 weeks and that most people would be unaffected by the legislation, at least in terms of how long they would collect benefits.

As of late March, more than 535,000 Floridians were receiving unemployment benefits.

Worker advocacy groups fought the legislation. But the business community, led by the Florida Chamber of Commerce, made passing the House version of the bill a priority, contending that businesses would benefit greatly from relief from the escalating tax to pay for jobless compensation.

Governor Scott also supported the House version.

Last week, with the legislative session winding down, the legislation bounced between both chambers of the Legislature — being retooled each time — until the compromise measure was approved in the waning hours of the session Friday night.



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