

Surge of Unemployment Claims May Force Other Budget Cuts

Benefits: From page 13

Luke Kenley. At the time, its unemployment trust was about \$2 billion.

In the end, an actuary concluded that the system was overfunded beyond any foreseeable event, he says. That analysis convinced legislators not only to cut payroll taxes, but also to increase benefits to those who were already unemployed. The trust started to be depleted.

Then, unemployment worsened as oil prices surged, especially in places like Elkhart, the

so-called "RV capital of the world," which saw demand collapse. The trust's funds fell 77% to \$91 million in the past year.

"I was concerned at the time that we were kidding ourselves that we could increase benefits," Senator Kenley says.

Today, he anticipates the state will eventually raise payroll taxes again to fund the system, although the state's overall finances are sound, he adds.

"We don't anticipate cutting services as much as we do 'spreading the pain' kind of ideas,

like freezing wage schedules for all state employees."

States await Obama's recovery package

Only 38% of unemployed Americans receive benefits, Mr. Emsellem points out, so the problems with unemployment trust funds represent only a fraction of a growing need. The answer, he says, lies in more federal money.

"What it all comes down to is the size of this whole recovery package that President-elect Obama and that Congress are putting together," he says.

Many states appear to agree. New Jersey's trust, despite a \$260 million emergency loan from Washington five months ago, is about to borrow money again with just four months of money

for benefits left.

"The scope of this may well have to be met at a federal level," says Kevin Smith, a spokesman for the New Jersey Department of Labor.

New Jersey, like Indiana, made a decision to deplete its fund in the 1990s, diverting \$4.7 billion from it to other uses. New Jersey Governor Jon Corzine, who says he put a stop to this practice when he took office in 2006, told the *Star Ledger* recently: "We have to pay that piper ... either by putting money into that system from some other place or we're going to have get help from the federal government."

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States Need \$546 Billion To Upgrade Systems for Unemployed Workers

Overwhelmed: From page 13

which this past fall started hiring 600 permanent workers and 300 temps to help it cope with a 16.4% increase in new claims. In addition, the state is spending more money on its computer systems.

"Our servers have been upgraded and expanded, and we are now upgrading our mainframe," said David Smith, a spokesman in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

In addition, Pennsylvania, which may see a big boost in claims after Alcoa lays off 15,000 workers, has expanded the hours of its workers in the unemployment office. Filers can even reach state workers on Sundays.

Although claims are high nationally, they are not at their peak – reached in 1982 when 695,000 people filed initial claims for unemployment in one month.

But in prior downturns, there were more offices for people to visit to get questions answered. In fact, the states could use an extra \$546 million to administer their programs, estimates the National Association of State Workforce Agencies.

"The problem is lack of resources [to hire] more employees and [modernize] computer systems," said Rich Hobbie, executive director.

For the past two years,

Representative Jim McDermott of Washington has sponsored the Unemployment Insurance Modernization Act, which includes \$7 billion to expand coverage and a one-year, \$500 million payment to states to improve administration. Several press reports indicate the legislation is expected to be included in President-elect Obama's economic stimulus program. It was already reintroduced last Thursday in the House.

The states, however, are split over supporting it because it would require the expansion of coverage to include such categories as some part-time workers, people who have compelling family emergencies, and workers enrolled in state training programs.

Some Republicans say they are opposed to the expansion. Some business groups, concerned their unemployment costs will rise in the future, are also against it.

Unemployment advocates, however, say the basic unemployment act, written in 1935, needs updating.

"It is woefully out of date," said Andrew Stettner of the National Employment Law Project in New York. "It will give the states an immediate boost to fill a gap in their unemployment insurance programs."

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Call-in System Now Offered Online

Michigan: From page 13

"Online MARVIN should reduce the number of calls to our telephone-based MARVIN system, while giving unemployed workers another option for completing their important eligibility certification," Mr. Geskey said.

Workers claiming unemployment benefits are required to certify with the system every other week to receive their biweekly unemployment benefit payment. Through the system, workers certify that they are still unemployed and meet the program's eligibility requirements. They also report any earnings they may have received.

The online- and telephone-based systems have many of the same features. The two systems use the same day and time reporting schedule, ask the same questions, require the

same identification, and process benefit payments on the same day the certification is made.

To use the online MARVIN system, individuals must create a free online account by visiting the UIA Web site at www.michigan.gov/uia and clicking on the link "UIA online services to unemployed workers." Users will be taken to a log-in page, where they can register and start the process of creating their own online account with the agency.

Users will immediately receive a temporary password – good for only 10 days – that will allow them to immediately certify online. A second password will be mailed to the individual that will give them full access to all of the Web account features.

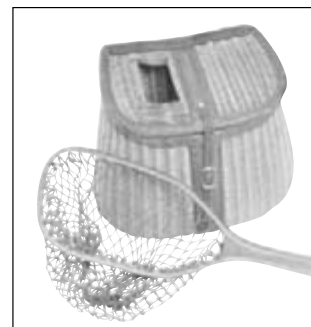
Putting the service online is part of the effort to help unemployed workers reach the agency.

Benefit Planned for Leach Family

A benefit luncheon is planned for the family of Joe Leach Sunday, February 8, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Pickford school cafeteria. Prizes and raffles will be available.

Mr. Leach passed away January 4.

For more information, contact Tracy Rye or Deedee Firack at 647-6285.



Weekly Fishing Report

Brevort Lake

Perch and walleye fishing on Brevort Lake has slowed due to the recent cold weather, said Willard Garlock of Ace Hardware in St. Ignace. Anglers that are getting perch and walleye bites on the lake are using minnows, wigglers, and wax worms, said Peggy Ferris of the St. Ignace Holiday Station Store.

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources weekly fishing report says walleye are biting along the eastern shoreline and bluegill are biting in the northwest section of the lake.

Cedarville Bay

Carley Ball of Wilderness Treasures in Pickford and AAA Michigan are reporting perch and walleye bites in good numbers in the Cedarville Bay area with minnows.

The DNR, however, reports catch rates for perch have slowed in the last week, but are still rated as "fair to good" on Musky Bay. The DNR recommends using wigglers and wax worms in 10 to 14 feet of water.

Munuscong Bay

Walleye catch rates on the bay are down after a cold front came through and "scattered" the fish, according to the DNR weekly report. The report suggests jigging in four to six feet deep water.

Mrs. Ball and AAA Michigan both report good perch and walleye fishing on Munuscong Lake when using minnows.

The Walleye Jamboree on Munuscong Bay starts at noon on Friday, January 30, and continues through noon on Sunday, February 1. Entry fees are \$10 for adults and \$5 for children younger than 15. Contact Wilderness Treasures at 647-4002 for more information.

Book Sale To Aid Hospital Auxiliary

The Mackinac Straits Hospital Auxiliary will host a book fair Thursday, February 5, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Friday, February 6, from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m.,

in the board room at the hospital's Long Term Care unit in St. Ignace.

The books are provided by Books Are Fun and sales will benefit the hospital auxiliary.

More Winterfest Winners Announced

Winners of the Mackinaw City winterfest frozen fish toss, frozen chicken bowling, and push broom hockey Saturday, January 18, have been announced.

Danny Duvall of Stanwood won the frozen fish toss in the adult division, while Amy Lytle of Saranac was runner up. In the youth division, Mitchell Flachs of Morley took the top spot with Hunter Campbell of Morley as runner up.

Chad Campbell of Morley was

the winner of the adult frozen chicken toss, and Tim LaJoice of St. Ignace claimed the runner-up spot. Alex Gietck of Hartland won the youth division, while Dillon Socolovitch of Cheboygan was runner up.

In the push broom hockey, April Flachs of Morley was the winner in the adult division and Mitchell Flachs was the winner in the youth division.

Other results and photographs were published January 22.



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