

WEEKEND PLUS

SUMMER FILM PREMIERE
Mission: Impossible III kicks off

OBSERVER-DISPATCH

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Business groups pushing for workers' comp reform

Say state's high premiums keep companies from competing

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the New York Workers' Compensation Action Network and Business Council of New York State said Wednesday.

Workers' compensation premiums for employers in New York state are the second highest in the nation, while benefits paid to injured employees are the

■ The New York Workers' Compensation Action Network's proposed reforms, 2A

lowest, said Larry Gilroy, network chairman.

At a news conference Wednesday at the Mohawk Valley Chamber of Commerce, Gregory Harden, chief executive officer of Harden Furniture Inc. in McConnellsville, said he fears his 162-year-old family

business will join other local companies that were forced to shut down because workers' compensation costs kept them from being competitive.

"I don't want to go the path of other businesses that couldn't compete," Harden said. "It's tough surviving if we don't have a state to support us."

Gov. George Pataki included workers' compensation Please see BUSINESS, 2A



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Utica police stands with
zens' Police

2006 RELAY FOR LIFE

A reason for walking tall

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FORECAST
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The local forecast by Amanda Gabeler, WKTV-2. Watch her complete forecast at 6 and 11.

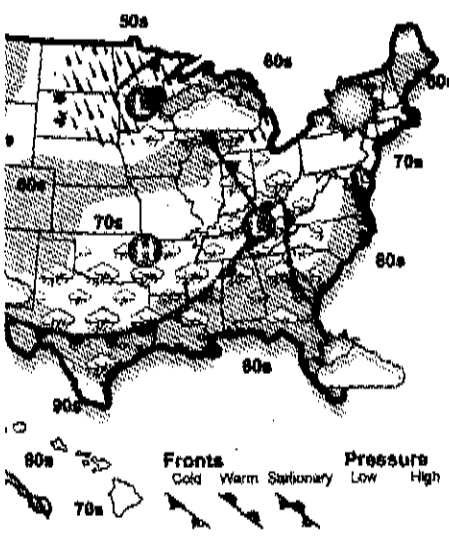


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|---|--------------|
| FRIDAY Mostly sunny early. | ▲68° ▼47° |
| SATURDAY Cloudy with rain. | ▲58° ▼40° |
| SUNDAY Mostly cloudy with showers | ▲55° ▼38° |
| MONDAY Morning clouds, rain. Sun later. | ▲58° ▼40° |

AROUND THE STATE

| City | Wednesday Hi | Lo | Precip. |
|---------------|--------------|-----------|----------|
| Albany | 73 | 47 | 0 |
| Binghamton | 67 | 45 | 0 |
| Buffalo | 69 | 41 | 0 |
| Elmira | 68 | 32 | 0 |
| Fulton | 66 | 35 | 0 |
| Glens Falls | 71 | 36 | 0 |
| Massena | 73 | 40 | 0 |
| New York City | 73 | 50 | 0 |
| Niagara Falls | 68 | 40 | 0 |
| Poughkeepsie | 73 | 43 | 0 |
| Rochester | 68 | 39 | 0 |
| Saranac Lake | 66 | 31 | 0 |
| Syracuse | 70 | 40 | 0 |
| UTICA | 71 | 40 | 0 |
| Watertown | 71 | 31 | 0 |

TODAY



Texas ▼5° Lake Yellowstone, Wyo.

D FORECAST

| Friday | Today | Friday |
|------------------|------------|------------|
| Hi Lo Otlk | Hi Lo Otlk | Hi Lo Otlk |
| 7 44 cdy Lubbock | 66 46 rain | 78 49 cdy |
| 9 28 cdy Memphis | 75 64 rain | 72 83 rain |

Business groups urge workers' comp reform

Continued from 1A

reform legislation in his 2006-07 executive budget, but Gilroy said it's still uncertain if legislators will support the proposal. The governor's plan would reduce workers' compensation costs for businesses by more than 15 percent, while increasing benefit levels for injured workers by 25 percent.

"Workers' compensation can be easily fixed, but unfortunately in Albany, it's business as usual," Gilroy said.

State Sen. Raymond Meier, R-Western, said some public officials may choose to duck the issue because it's an election year, but reform is needed to make the state more attractive for business.

"It's the kind of reform we need to keep jobs and if we ever want to have a thriving economy in New York," Meier said.

The AFL-CIO shares the business groups' criticisms of the current system, but not their support for the governor's proposal, said Mario Cilento, a spokesman for the state chapter of the union. Cilento said the insurance industry should be investigated to determine how much it profits from workers' compensation coverage.

"We oppose the governor's bill, but we have no dispute over premiums being too high, and it's been 14 years since employees have seen a raise in benefits," Cilento said.

Assemblywoman RoAnn Destito, D-Rome, said she doesn't support Pataki's proposal and should be handled separately from the state budget.

"It's public policy and it deserves to have its own discussion and debate," Destito said.

Unlike 41 other states, New York does not cap how long someone can collect benefits for permanent partial disability, leading some to take advantage of the system, said Elliott A. Shaw Jr., director of government affairs for the Business Council. That means people with more serious injuries get limited benefits while others

AT A GLANCE

The New York Workers' Compensation Action Network has proposed the following reforms to the state workers' compensation system.

- ▶ Limit or place a cap on permanent partial disability awards. While making up only 11.7 percent of claims, these awards account for 73 percent of all incurred losses. The network proposes to limit such awards to 10 years.

- ▶ Establish objective medical guidelines. New York has no guidelines to determine the degree of disability for workers receiving benefits. The network recommends adopting American Medical Association guidelines used in 39 states to give more accurate assessments of injuries.

- ▶ Pay full benefits only for actual lost wages. Under current law, some recipients may continue receiving benefits even after they return to work.

- ▶ Create Social Security and pension offsets. Some employees collect workers' compensation even after retirement. The network wants to eliminate workers' compensation for retirees or those receiving Social Security or pension benefits.

Source: www.fixworkerscomp.com

with less-serious injuries may be compensated for a longer period of time.

"Say you lose your hand; you can get benefits up to 200 weeks, not the rest of your life," Shaw explained. "But say your back hurts, you can get it for life."

Scott Millbower, safety manager for Conmed Corp., said high costs make the system unfair for the employers who are paying exuberant premium costs and the employees who don't receive the amount of benefits they deserve.

"With employees internationally, Conmed has 3,100 (workers) roughly, and about 40 percent of that work force is in New York state, yet it accounts for 60 percent of our workers' compensation costs," Millbower said.

Relay f

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during the Relay f are so important, s pell, a media relati for the American city. The relays tak Mohawk Valley weekends in June five to 15 membe walking the track of 24 hours.

"The reason why held overnight is sleeps or never ta Norpell said. "A p take a break from Friday or on a bir day."

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The leaders have override the veto return to the Capi from their Easter-P While Legislature a have been meeting try to reach a com have been no break since Assembly Sp Silver, D-Manhattan Passover until sund window for a dea before next week is

A Pataki spokel the vetoes Wednes

"As the Govern ed previously, man grams are worthy the Governor wot ferred to not issu vetoes," spoke Swency said. "Bt ture's budget was

CORRECTIONS AI

The Observer-Dispe event of substantiv them promptly and,