

HB 519 -- Unemployment Insurance

Sponsor: Roark

This bill changes the laws regarding unemployment insurance. The bill:

(1) Requires that for calendar year 2006 and thereafter, if on September 30 the net balance in the Unemployment Compensation Trust Fund is at least \$400 million, the taxable wage base will not increase above \$11;

(2) Requires that for initial unemployment claims filed during the calendar year 2006 and thereafter, the maximum weekly benefit amount will be 3.75% of the average of the two highest earnings quarters of the worker's base period;

(3) Requires that for calendar year 2006 and thereafter, if the fund's net balance is \$400 million or less, the maximum weekly benefit amount will not exceed \$250. Beginning January 1 of the year following the year in which the fund's net balance is \$400 million or more, the maximum weekly benefit amount will be \$270. For each subsequent year in which the fund's net balance is \$400 million or more, the maximum weekly benefit amount will increase by \$10, not to exceed a maximum weekly benefit amount of \$320. The fund's net balance will be the balance less any obligations as of September 30 of the preceding year;

(4) Requires that alcohol and controlled substance testing be conducted by accrediting organizations, certifying organizations, or any professional society approved by the United States Department of Transportation;

(5) Requires that alcohol and controlled substance test results be admissible if the employer's policy states that an employee may be subject to random testing;

(6) Authorizes an employer to require a pre-employment test for the presence of alcohol or controlled substances as a condition of employment;

(7) Specifies that an employee's refusal to take a test for the presence of alcohol or controlled substances be considered misconduct and disqualifies the claimant for the waiting week credit and unemployment benefits;

(8) Requires that if a claimant is disqualified on a second or subsequent occasion within the base period, the claimant must earn wages equal to or in excess of six times the claimant's weekly benefit amount for each of the occasions;

(9) Specifies that absenteeism or tardiness constitutes misconduct;

(10) Removes the temporary debt indebtedness assessment which was to be added to the employer's contribution rate for calendar years 2005, 2006, and 2007;

(11) Adds the State Treasurer to the Board of Unemployment Fund Financing; and

(12) Allows the board to use credit instruments which mature no later than 10 years after issuance.