

Murdo, Patricia

From: Al Smith MTLA [monttla@mt.net]
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To: Murdo, Patricia
Subject: Comments Work Comp

Pat - I'm on road to an oral surgery appointment, so doubt I'll be able to call in, so here are comments:

The main benefit for workers in the package is a slight increase in the number of weeks they can receive permanent partial disability benefits, and an increase in the cap on their weekly benefit as a percentage of the state's average weekly wage. Now, if only those changes were made, all workers would see an increase in benefits. But, the manner in which those benefits are calculated is also changed, resulting in 25% of workers seeing a reduction in benefits, 15% seeing no change and 60% seeing an increase in benefits. And even those numbers are just guesstimates at this point - more workers may be losers.

That's because the proposal eliminates wage loss - the difference between what an injured worker made at the time of injury and what she can make after she has recovered from her injury - from the calculation.

The proposal calculates benefits on the physical impairment the injury caused without consideration of whether the impairment means an actual reduction in the worker's ability to earn money. This theoretical solution can result in inequitable situations where two workers doing the same job and earning the same wage, suffer different impairments and the worker who is unable to return work at the same job receives less benefits than his co-worker who is able to return the same job.

There are other serious concerns with the reform proposal, such as cutting rates paid to health care providers and reducing vocational rehabilitation services. Hopefully, the advisory council and the legislature will take a closer look at the reforms, especially benefits for injured workers. It's hard to see how a reduction or no change in benefits for 40% of workers can be seen as a benefit for all injured workers. The result of eliminating wage loss as a part of the benefit calculation is to, once again, reduce costs at the expense of injured workers.

Oh, and as far as reforms to address our number one problem - our high injury rate - nothing at all in the reform proposal for that.

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