

House delays vote on restoring jobless checks

By

Thursday, 26 May 2011 14:47 - Last Updated Saturday, 28 May 2011 12:01

RALEIGH -- The political stalemate that's caused thousands of North Carolinians to stop receiving unemployment benefits will continue through the Memorial Day weekend.

House lawmakers delayed a vote on a bill that would restore jobless checks for more than 42,000 people and put budget cuts in place if a formal plan isn't adopted by June 30.

It's the second attempt by GOP lawmakers to attach a stop-gap spending plan to a measure that would allow individuals to continue receiving federal benefits after 79 weeks. The proposed fix would keep unemployment checks coming for an additional 20 weeks.

Democratic Gov. Bev Perdue vetoed a similar measure which included a 1-year budget resolution that requires her to cut spending by 13 percent. The latest version would reduce state spending by about 4 percent, although Perdue would have much less control in determining where the cuts should occur.

Perdue has called on lawmakers to pass a fix that would solely address the jobless benefits issue. "For weeks, 42,000 unemployed North Carolinians have waited for the legislature to show leadership by passing legislation that will restore their federal unemployment benefits," she said in a statement. "Instead the legislature has refused to do the right thing and played politics by passing a bill that ties unemployment benefits to the legislature's budget games."

House Speaker Thom Tillis, R-Mecklenburg, [defended the latest proposal](#), which he called a "middle ground" position. Tillis also said given Perdue's recent comments, it didn't make sense to take up the bill. "Why would we – on a day when we have all people in town able to go and review the budget and spend their time productively – go spend an hour or an hour and a half debating something that's she's already said she'll veto," Tillis told reporters following session.

In the meantime, Tillis said GOP leaders will review differences in the Senate budget proposal before the Senate holds the first scheduled floor vote on Tuesday. That plan also includes language that would reinstate the jobless benefits. Tillis said he's hopeful lawmakers can reach a compromise with the Senate that would ultimately allow the House to adopt those changes and avoid further budget negotiations in conference committee.

"I think it would be historic," said Tillis. "I think it's probably the most expedient way for us to move on with the people's business. So, I'm still holding out hope that we may be able to do that."

Tillis said the House may revisit the unemployment fix next week, if lawmakers fail to reach a compromise on the budget.