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## Fletcher teams with Democrat on health

*Posted by Michael Gardner*

SACRAMENTO - A San Diego Republican and Sacramento Democrat have teamed to try and take some of the bite out of COBRA.

Assemblymen Nathan Fletcher and **Dave Jones** say their bipartisan measure, Assembly Bill 23, is California's plan to implement a key goal of the federal stimulus package to help the unemployed maintain health insurance.

The legislation moved out of the Assembly Health Committee Tuesday.

"It's hard enough on a person to lose their job, imagine losing your health care too," said Fletcher of San Diego. "The cost of COBRA insurance can be overwhelming and force people to drop their health care altogether. With this bill in place, we offer stability to hard-working Californians by ensuring them an affordable opportunity to keep their doctors."

The unwieldy titled Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1985, better known as COBRA, does provide laid off worker the option of continuing health care insurance, but they must pay the entire premium.

The federal stimulus package would pay 65 percent of the premium for those eligible to participate, if California passes implementing legislation.

The difference can be staggering. Fletcher's figures indicate that, for a family of four, the basic premium is about \$170 a month for an employee while the employer picks up \$450 a month. Under the proposed state change, a newly jobless worker would pay \$327 a month instead of the full \$620.

The California measure also extends a second chance to some of those newly unemployed who decided not to enroll in COBRA.

The legislation now goes to the Appropriations Committee. It is expected to be amended to become an urgency measure, which would require a two-thirds majority for passage off the Assembly and Senate floors before reaching the governor's desk. He has not taken a position.

"The quick passage of this bill is critical in order to meet the health care needs of California families," said Jones of Sacramento.