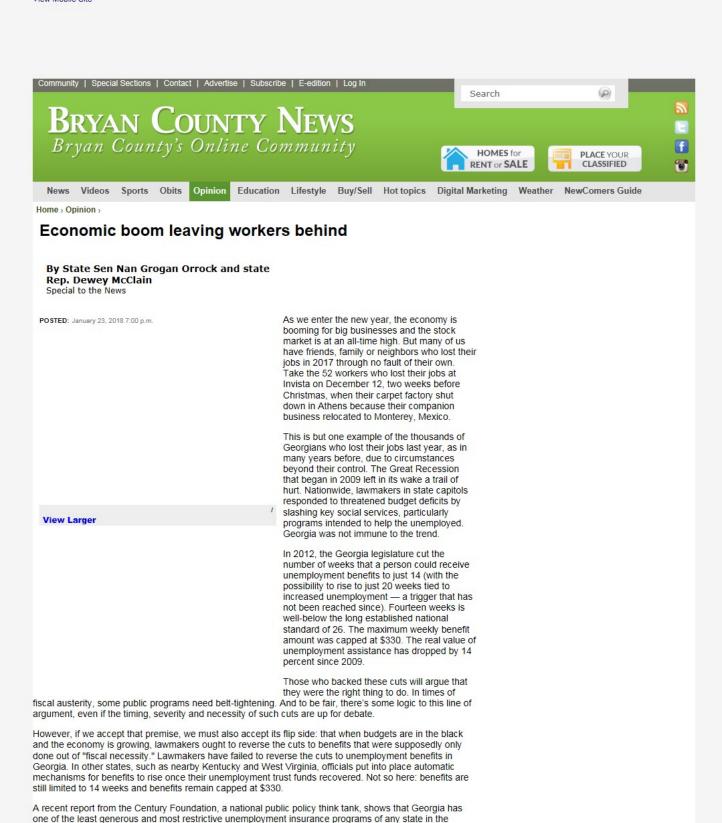
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more than \$761 million in debt to a \$1.8 billion surplus

country, despite a dramatic turnaround in the health of our unemployment trust fund, which has gone from

Who has benefited from this recovery? Not workers, and definitely not the unemployed.

Currently, only 12 percent of jobless workers in Georgia receive an unemployment payment, the 4th lowest in the country. That's down from 33 percent in 2009.

What's more, business owners paid among the lowest unemployment tax rates of any state — only 0.37 percent in unemployment taxes last year, down from the 0.58 percent rate they paid in 2012. That amounts to an average savings of \$179.56 per employee, according to the Century Foundation analysis.

In short, employers are reaping the benefits from a recovered unemployment trust fund and steadily-expanding economy. For workers, on the other hand, it still feels like the aftermath of the recession.

As lawmakers, we have a duty to help the most vulnerable in our state. That means people who are out of work and are diligently looking for jobs; it doesn't mean big business, many of which are experiencing record profits.

The new year offers an opportunity to be better neighbors to Georgians who have fallen on hard times. We must take a renewed look at unemployment insurance, and, at a minimum, restore benefits to their pre-recession levels. The money is there to do so. With a big surplus, Georgia is now one of 29 states that meet or exceed federal standards for being prepared for the next recession.

Right now, we can and must offer stronger support for the unemployed. The General Assembly should restore unemployment benefits to strengthen the economy and guard against the next downturn.

Orrock is a member of the state Senate, representing District 36 (Atlanta — Fulton County). McClain is a member of the House, representing District 100 (Lawrenceville — Gwinnett County) and is president of the Atlanta North Georgia Labor Council AFL-CIO. They serve as co-chairs of the Georgia Working Families Legislative Caucus.



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