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MOST LABOR AND WORKFORCE COMMITTEE MEMBERS SKIP JOBS HEARING

Although no formal sessions were scheduled Wednesday to divide their time, most lawmakers on the Committee on Labor and Workforce Development skipped a hearing on bills aimed at helping young people find jobs, extending the life of a business-supported workforce training fund and to boost women struggling in the workforce. None of the committee's six senators attended the packed hearing, and House Chair Cheryl Coakley-Rivera left after an hour, leaving vice chair Rep. Robert Rice to chair the hearing. Only Rice and Rep. Paul McMurtry remained in the room after the first hour of the hearing, with Coakley-Rivera, as well as Reps. Sean Garballey, Jim Arciero and Ann-Margaret Ferrante, having departed. Five of the committee's 11 House members – Democrats John Rogers, John Fresolo and Michael Rush, and Republicans Todd Smola and Karyn Polito -- did not attend any portion of the hearing. The hearing featured often-emotional testimony from students in poor communities who helped turn their lives around because of various youth work programs. Students spoke in favor of a bill (H 3696) aimed at preventing students from dropping out of school and boosting programs that assist youth career training. Backers of the bill said it was a valuable avenue for students to explore the careers they may pursue. "This program changes lives by exposing students to opportunities that they otherwise would not have access to," said Ed Powell, deputy director of the Boston Private Industry Council. Powell was joined by employers who credited their school-to-career programs with steering students toward successful jobs. Ada Lee, a Charlestown High School guidance counselor, who graduated from the same school in 2003, said a private sector internship helped her gain experience she hadn't while in school, which enabled her to pursue her current career. The hearing included five panels, most speaking in support of the youth jobs proposal. Business officials also urged passage of legislation protecting a workforce training fund that the Legislature has raided for \$20 million over the past two years to help with general state budget balancing. Poor attendance by lawmakers is common at public hearings on bills.