

Chamber optimistic about asbestos reform

Business Insurance | by [Mark A. Hofmann](#)

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WASHINGTON—The head of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce is “somewhat optimistic” that asbestos litigation reform legislation will become law this year.

Doing so requires getting the support of organized labor, defendant companies in asbestos-related suits and their insurers, said Thomas J. Donohue, president and chief executive officer of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, during a luncheon briefing on Tuesday. But all the interested parties are fighting “about who the hell’s going to pay for it,” Mr. Donohue said. He said that the Chamber “will continue to play a major role in brokering an acceptable approach among all parties.”

The Senate Judiciary Committee approved legislation that would replace the current litigation-based system for compensating victims of asbestos-related diseases last year, but the measure has yet to come to a full Senate vote.

Mr. Donohue sounded more optimistic about the chances for enactment of the Class Action Reform Act, which would allow the removal of certain interstate class actions to federal courts from state courts. The House has already passed its version of the act, and although Senate supporters initially failed by one vote to block a potential filibuster against the measure, some opponents later agreed to support an amended version of the bill.

“We have a commitment from more than enough people to move this bill forward,” Mr. Donohue said. He added, though, that even with such commitments, passage of an acceptable measure is not guaranteed, and that his organization will continue working hard to achieve the reform.