WORK WEEK

cutting and a decline in attendance. Preschool care remains, says a spokesman. Meanwhile, Honeywell International Inc.'s Clearwater, Fla., office will shut down its day-care center because of an enrollment decline, growth of outside providers and facilities concerns, the company says.

Human-resources consultant Hewitt Associates says companies, mindful of costs, instead are looking into providing employees with vouchers for existing nearby day-care centers. Bright Horizons Family Solutions Inc., Boston, which runs day-care centers, says companies aren't closing centers, but new contracts are getting "a little more review," according to Gary O’Neil, senior vice president. He says institutions such as universities and hospitals still show strong interest.

Hewitt says about 12% of big employers last year offered on-site day care in at least one of their locations.

PLUMBERS' PENSION-PLAN trustees are under fire over hotel investment.

Martin Maddaloni, head of the plumbers' and pipe fitters’ union, sent a letter to locals saying the Labor Department could "take action" against the union’s pension-plan trustees over its redevelopment of the Diplomat Hotel in Hollywood, Fla. Some union members have criticized the project, which cost $800 million, double the original estimate. The project now accounts for a fifth of the pension plan's total investment assets.

One union official says Labor asked five of the plan's six fiduciaries, including Mr. Maddaloni, to resign or face a lawsuit. The agency declined to comment. In his letter, Mr. Maddaloni said the Diplomat has been doing better than projected after opening this year, and that he expects it to provide "substantial income for many, many years." He said the trustees will present their views soon to senior Labor regulators. His attorney says Mr. Maddaloni wasn't available to comment.

SUPREME QUESTIONS: Will last week's decision create more illegal workers?

If a company doesn't have to pay back wages to a fired illegal immigrant, as the Supreme Court
said last week, illegal workers might become more popular, says Muzaffar Chishti of the Migration Policy Institute, Washington, D.C. He expects companies to test the limits of other laws regarding illegal workers.

The decision comes after unions made inroads with immigrants, legal or otherwise, after Sept. 11. Union aid programs received wide coverage in the ethnic press, says the National Immigration Forum's Frank Sharry. Ciceron Cirico, a janitor from Peru, is trying to organize workers at his company, Accent Maintenance Corp., in Ossining, N.Y., into the Service Employees International union.

"There's not a lot of job stability or trust between immigrants and employers," he says. "We need the union."

INFLATION RX: The Bureau of Labor Statistics weighs the merits of including medical expenses borne by employers, not just consumers, in the consumer price index. Given current trends, that would likely nudge up measured inflation. Bureau official John Greenlees cautions such a change isn't currently in the works but could eventually be tested in an "experimental index."

COMING SOON? The Senate labor committee reschedules an April 15 hearing to discuss the Labor Department's ergonomic injuries plan. The move from last month's date gives Labor time to release its plan.

THE DAILY GRIND: Animals don't always perform on cue, and that is where Charles Alan Parker comes in. A guitar player for Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey circus, Mr. Parker, 24 years old, sometimes has to vamp for the audience when an animal takes its time performing. He and other band members travel with the circus by train. He notes the animal smell is never far away. "If you work with animals you definitely get a smell," he says. Musicians start at $730 a week.

HATS OFF: A U.S. cap company gets a hard look from universities.

In recent months, Ohio State University, the University of Iowa and other colleges have questioned or canceled contracts with New Era Cap Co., a closely held firm near Buffalo, N.Y. The schools are responding to allegations by the Worker Rights Consortium, an antisweatshop group that has dealt with companies abroad, that U.S. workers face unsafe conditions.

New Era says the scrutiny is due to a dispute with the Communications Workers of America union, which represents some of its employees. New Era's Tim Freer says the company plans to meet with WRC this month. "We want to make sure rights are respected, whether it's in Bangladesh or Buffalo," says WRC's Scott Nova.

He says the group doesn't take union money, though AFL-CIO official Linda Chavez-Thompson is one of 50 board members.

THE CHECKOFF: About 6.6% of U.S. families had at least one unemployed family member last year, compared with 5.7% the year before, the Labor Department says.

-- Carlos Tejada