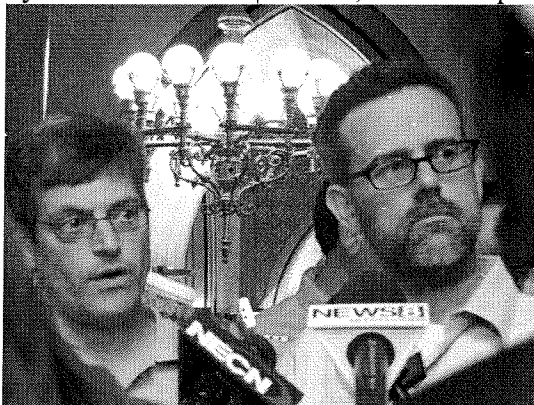


Unions Urge Patience, Malloy Readies 'Plan B'

by Christine Stuart | Jun 22, 2011 3:44pm



Hugh McQuaid photo- Larry Dorman and Matt O'Connor, SEBAC spokesmen

(Updated 4:58 p.m.) With one of the 15 unions voting against the package and one of the state's biggest unions in a position to defeat it, two union spokesmen came to the Capitol Wednesday to urge the public and the media to be patient as they wait for the balloting to be completed.

"Thousands of state employees have votes to cast and we intend and want to be very respectful of that process," Larry Dorman SEBAC spokesman, said. "We're urging them to turn out and vote, not only to save their jobs and benefits, but to reject the campaigns of misinformation."

"A decisive number of state employees have voted in favor of the agreement to date," Dorman said. But the outlook doesn't look good.

Six of the 15 unions have voted in favor of the package, but enough individual members of AFSCME, the state's largest union with 15,600 members, have voted against it to possibly kill the deal. AFSCME Local 391, which represents prison guards, is voting today and Thursday. In order for the vote to be ratified a large number of the 1,850 members would need to vote in favor of it in order for it to pass. The two other locals representing prison guards have voted against the deal.

The Connecticut Employees Union Independent Local 511, which represents 4,500 service and maintenance employees, voted down the agreement Tuesday by about 194 votes.

Union sources say AFSCME is about 800 votes behind where it needs to be in order to **pass the deal**.

"Again, 1,850 members still have to vote and it's critical we respect their right to vote," Dorman said Wednesday.

Asked if there was a possibility of a re-vote of some locals or bargaining groups, Dorman and Matt O'Connor, another SEBAC spokesman, said that's not a question they're prepared to answer at this point.

"We're committed to allow this process to continue," O'Connor said.

As the voting continues Gov. Dannel P. Malloy will be looking to work with legislative leaders in putting the final touches on the dreaded 'Plan B' budget, which will include laying off thousands of state employees and cutting state services.

There has been hope by some state employees that the parts of the agreement, including the Value-Added Health Plan, would be renegotiated.

Roy Occhiogrosso, Malloy's senior communications adviser, dismissed the possibility the administration would sit down again with the unions and renegotiate the package with just one week left before the new fiscal year.

Still other state employees, who had grown accustomed to early retirement incentive plans over the past few years, hoped that Malloy would change his mind about offering one.

"Nope. Not happening," Occhiogrosso said.

"There is no other negotiation that can take place," Occhiogrosso said Wednesday.

"If the agreement goes down in the end, then the governor is required to submit a plan to the legislature to balance the budget," Occhiogrosso said. "The governor will submit a plan to close that gap."

Malloy will have to find \$700 million in savings from the \$20.14 billion budget adopted for the fiscal year that starts July 1.

"Spending cuts, layoffs, cuts to municipal aid. Those are all options," Occhiogrosso said. "The only thing that's not an option is a tax increase beyond what has already been raised."

The number of layoffs could amount to 7,500 over the next two years, but Occhiogrosso wouldn't say how many pink slips would need to go out once the vote is finalized.

Asked if the unions did a good enough job selling the deal to their membership, Occhiogrosso hesitated to comment, but then decided to comment anyway.

"There are obviously other people that have taken it upon themselves, individuals and organizations maybe, to communicate and spread misinformation; and so as someone who has worked on numerous campaigns during which people who were not part of the campaign sat on the sideline and lobbed all sort of criticism in without understanding — it's not for me to stand here and criticize because I'm not the one who has to do that campaign," Occhiogrosso said. "It's a tough job. I'll say that."

Has the governor done enough?

"That's an understatement," Occhiogrosso said. "I think the governor has been very public, and very clear for a very long time about why he thinks this is a good agreement. Why he thinks it's a fair agreement."

He said this came up at all 17 town halls and he has done everything he can possibly do, but in the end it's up to the union membership to decide their fate.

A special session, as early as next week, could be likely if the unions fail to ratify the agreement.

House Speaker Chris Donovan said in a phone interview Wednesday that he's reserving his comments until the unions complete the voting process.

Meanwhile, municipal leaders expressed their concern.

"If state employees fail to ratify the concession agreement, the municipal-aid cuts that could be presented as part of a budget-cutting alternative would have a devastating impact on towns and cities." Jim Finley, executive director and CEO of the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities, said. "These cuts would decimate municipal services, raise property taxes, and result in municipal employee and teacher layoffs."

"CCM is urging mayors and first selectmen across Connecticut to engage their local union officials in an effort to convince their state union colleagues to ratify the concession package now—or cities and towns, their residents and businesses, and municipal employees and teachers will pay the price," said Finley. "State employees' unwillingness to accept reasonable concessions will cost the jobs of their brothers and sisters at the local level."