

State Workers Should Approve Deal — For Their Sake & the State's

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This year's General Assembly session closes Wednesday with one piece of unfinished business wedging its big foot in the door: State employee unions have yet to say whether they accept the agreement reached to close the largest budget gap in Connecticut's history.

They should, for the sake of the state and because it's truly a good deal for them. Their benefits would continue to be the envy of all.

But anyone studying reader comments on news stories — an unscientific survey, to be sure — can quickly get the idea that members of the 15 state employee unions will vote against the tentative agreement reached by their representatives and the Malloy administration last month.

A thumbs-down to the deal by the rank and file would be a catastrophe for them and for the state. We hope there's a large silent majority of the 45,000 state workers who will seal the deal before the end of this month. This is as good a bargain as they can get — starting with a no-layoff guarantee for four years. Changes in health and pension benefits would still leave state workers with enviable plans.

Agreement will put into place the final element of Gov. **Dannel P. Malloy's** plan to balance the budget and close a deficit of more than \$3 billion in each of the next two fiscal years. The governor and legislature cut \$800 million in spending and raised taxes by \$1.5 billion. But they needed concessions from workers to make the budget work.

Under the deal, state workers will get to keep such perks as defined-benefit pension plans, though they would have a two-year wage freeze. Employee contributions to health care plans will still be low, as will emergency-room co-pays. Employees will have to get regular checkups and preauthorization for costly services such as MRIs; those are reasonable requirements.

If workers fail to ratify the deal, the governor and lawmakers will be forced to take drastic action. Layoffs would extend well past the 4,700 employees called for in the unpopular "Plan B" floated before the tentative agreement was reached. Entire departments or agencies might be taken down.

Besides incurring the human cost of thousands of workers losing their jobs, rejection of the deal would be a crippling blow to the delivery of state services, a rending of the social safety net, the end of some popular programs, and probably a cut in state aid to municipalities, leading to property-tax increases.

State employees like to say they didn't cause the state's financial problems. In truth, they played a part by wielding so much political influence as to gain an unsustainable level of compensation and benefits.

Now they can help to solve state government's problem by doing their part to push Mr. Malloy's "shared sacrifice" budget over the hump. That means voting for the agreement.