

# Unions Launch Informational Campaign As Agreement Is Finalized

by Christine Stuart | May 26, 2011 6:17pm

There's no single union in the state that has cast a vote on the \$1.6 billion concession package because the tentative agreement has yet to be fully inked, a union spokesman said Thursday.

As the General Assembly and Gov. Dannel P. Malloy's administration race toward the June 8 adjournment date, state employees are still sorting through the details provided in a summary and a handful of new videos released Thursday.

Daniel Livingston, chief negotiator for the State Employees Bargaining Agent Coalition, is featured in some of the brief videos explaining the details of the package, including the controversial value-added medical plan that requires employees to pay an additional \$100 monthly premium if they decide not to get an annual physical. Robert Krzys, head of SEBAC's health care cost containment committee, also is featured in some of the videos explaining the mandatory mail-order prescription policy.

The unions expect to be uploading multiple video clips to continue to reach out to their membership to answer questions about the deal.

And they know they're competing against state employees who are encouraging their colleagues to vote against the five-year package which provides job security for four years and 3 percent wage increases in the last three.

SEBAC's competition seems to be this web site [Votenoconcessions.com](http://Votenoconcessions.com).

The manifesto on the site, which was created May 18 two days after CTNewsjunkie posted the summary of the tentative agreement, encourages state employees to vote against the package.

"In summary, the governor we elected, requested to negotiate a contract with six years left on it," the unnamed state employee who created the web site wrote. "In an effort to help him, our unions heads/negotiators sat down to discuss short term changes. During discussions he demanded long term changes, then he threatened layoffs, eventually we gave him everything he wanted."

Not all state employees feel the same way.

Godfrey Ferguson, of Local 2663, said **last week** that he was generally happy with the agreement but said he has heard co-workers criticize its Value Based Health Care provisions. That part of the plan would, among other things, require employees to sign a form pledging to attend annual physicals, age-appropriate diagnostics, and two free dental cleanings per year.

Ferguson said some of his co-workers interpret that plan as the government essentially telling them how to live. But he said they may come around after they are educated about the program. Ferguson said he tries to live a healthy life and would like to see his colleagues do the same, especially if it saves taxpayers money.

Still others like Lillian Sewell, an AFSCME Council 4 retiree, said last week that she was concerned with the priorities evident in the agreement. Sewell was part of the negotiating committee for AFSCME before she retired in 1997, and said back then state employees focused on benefits rather than wages.

She was critical of the agreement, saying a three-year increase in the retirement age will be bad news for her son, who also is a state employee.

“What really saddens me is when I hear my youngest son saying to me, ‘Mom, I don’t know if I can do my job if they raise the age, I have really physical job,’” she said. “The state workers always had the best benefits, my husband retired from Pratt and Whitney and I had to put him on my insurance.”

The summary of the agreement increases the retirement age by three years, but not until 2022.

In order for the agreement to be adopted, 14 of 15 unions, or 80 percent of those voting, will need to ratify it. Once the tentative agreement is inked the voting process could take as long as three weeks, like it did back in 2009 when changes to the 1997 agreement were ratified by SEBAC members.

Matt O’Connor, spokesman for SEBAC, said there’s a lot of misinformation out there and while he doesn’t have a problem with debate or dissent, he wants to make certain state employees have all the information they need before they vote.

Larry Dorman, another spokesman for SEBAC, said it’s counterintuitive for anyone to urge rejection of an agreement they haven’t even seen.

O’Connor added that in 2009 it took 14 days to get from the framework of an agreement to the final product, but this year’s agreement is much more complicated.

He said they’re currently looking at voting to occur by the third week of June, which cuts it close to the start of the new fiscal year that starts July 1.

**Tags: labor, concessions, union, agreement, SEBAC, budget, connecticut**