

## CSEA DEAL AVOIDS LAYOFF PAINS



With less than a month to go before the layoff ax falls, members of the state's largest union will be reviewing a five-year contract agreement with Gov. Andrew Cuomo that could remove them from the chopping block. Unveiled Wednesday, the deal between the governor and the Civil Service Employees Association includes givebacks including three years without broad-based raises and a week of unpaid furlough, but provides protection against job cuts for the union's 66,000 members. Both CSEA's leadership and the governor pointed to the safeguards as a key feature in a deal that Cuomo said will be offered to other major state unions. "This gets us the savings without a single layoff, which is why it really is extraordinary on the CSEA side," Cuomo said of the deal. "There are other unions, as you know, we're negotiating with ... but I think this basically has established the pattern." CSEA President Danny Donohue said the governor "wanted to find another way other than having layoffs," Donohue said. "We recognize the fiscal problems the state has." Announcement of a contract deal, which still requires ratification by members, came after CSEA's 300 local presidents traveled to the Capital Region from across the state. The agreement was announced after a closed-door meeting Wednesday morning at The Desmond Hotel in Colonie. Ballots on the contract could go out in mid-July, union officials said, adding that it could be approved by August. Observers expect the vote to pass. Without the agreement, the union could face up to 4,500 layoffs if Cuomo went through with the "worst-case scenario" of 9,800 job reductions to achieve \$450 million in state workforce savings, as called for in the current-year budget. The contract applies to CSEA state employees, not local government workers who may also be represented by CSEA. But labor watchers wondered if Cuomo was also attempting to create a bargaining template for local governments to employ -- especially given the similarity between the 2 percent raises called for in the latter years of the contract and the 2 percent tax cap he is trying to get through the Legislature. The administration appeared to be backing off slightly on the \$450 million figure. Even if the contract is adopted by CSEA and every other major bargaining unit, it's unclear if the state would be able to save that sum before the current fiscal year ends in March 31, 2012. Still, "We're going to get comfortably close to that number in this fiscal year," Budget Division spokesman Morris Peters said. He noted both the current 2011-2012 state budget and the 2012-2013 plan call for \$450 million in savings in each year. Some of the savings from the five-year contract could actually be realized over the course of the two-year period, and not just in the nine months that remain in the current fiscal year. In addition to two years without raises, the contract calls for an unpaid five-day furlough during this fiscal year, and another four-day furlough next year (the lost wages from the four-day period would be repaid in the fifth year of the deal). Members would get 2 percent raises in 2014 and 2015 as well as \$1,000 worth of bonuses in 2013 and 2014. Employees would have modestly higher health care co-pays, and those with higher salaries would pay more. Workers would retain their longevity payments and "step" increases, as well as the ability to use unused sick time credits to offset health insurance premiums after retirement. The issues had surfaced in earlier offers with other unions but negotiators ultimately kept the benefits intact. With the CSEA deal now in the hands of its membership, attention is likely to focus on the Public Employees Federation, whose negotiators have reportedly been at a standstill with Cuomo's team for more than a month. Two weeks ago, the union leadership was so angered by the governor's decision to begin the layoff process that it broke the traditional silence on the talks and posted what it described as the governor's offer and the union's counter-proposal on its website. At a rally Monday at the Capitol, PEF President Ken Brynien charged Cuomo was disrespecting union members with his contract offers. "The governor does not respect the state workforce," he said. Brynien struck a more subdued tone Wednesday, reacting to the CSEA deal with a prepared statement saying that PEF's 56,000 members were waiting to hear back from the governor's team on its latest offer. Meanwhile, the Cuomo administration continues gathering lists of jobs that could be eliminated and verifying the seniority lists that would come into play if actual cuts are carried out. Layoff notices will be suspended for CSEA employees during the ratification period, an administration source said. If the ratification fails, layoff notices will go out immediately. The tentative agreement, according to CSEA's description, says union members through 2013 "shall be protected from layoffs resulting from the fact and circumstances that gave rise to the present need for \$450 million in workforce savings." In the final years of the contract, "only material or unanticipated changes in the state's fiscal circumstances, financial plan or revenue" would lead to layoffs. The shield does not include jobs cuts through consolidations or downsizing such as prisons, now in the planning stages. CSEA contract points Major provisions of the tentative contract between CSEA and the state: No across-the-board salary increase for the next three fiscal years, followed by 2 percent increases in each of the subsequent two years. Step and longevity increases will remain. Nine unpaid days of furloughs: five unpaid in the current fiscal year; four in the next, with repayment in year five of the contract. Workers with less seniority (Grade 9 and below) would pay a 2 percent increase in health insurance premiums; longer-serving workers (Grade 10 and above) would pay a 6 percent increase. Various increases in medical co-pays and prescription drug benefits. No change in ability to use sick leave credits to reduce the cost of health insurance premiums after retirement. Read the full article here: [CSEA deal avoids layoff pain - Albany Times Union](#)