

CONNECTICUT LEAVES VACANCIES NOW INSTEAD OF LAYING OFF LATER



Have you ever wondered about the alternatives to layoffs? It seems like in many states there has been little consideration about other ways to streamline state governments, and their often-unwieldy budgets, besides putting people out of work. To be honest it is the least desirable option, since it reduces the amount of people who can afford to make purchases and boost the state economy, but it seems to be a first choice in many places when the going gets tough. Luckily, there are other options out there, and some states are beginning to explore these choices in order to cut their budgets without serious service reductions or long union battles, such as the ones faced this year in the state of New York. Dannel P. Malloy, the Governor of Connecticut, is taking a different approach to the problem. Instead of laying off workers he simply is not hiring them in the first place. The state will leave roughly 2,300 jobs in the executive branch vacant. While this represents only 5 percent of the workforce employed by the state, it is part of a larger plan to streamline expenses. The plan was given a serious boost when more employees decided to retire than the state expected. That is not to say that the State of Connecticut will not be doing any hiring this year. As it turns out they are going to be filling 990 of the jobs that have been vacated by retirees. While, according to documents given to The Associated Press, this is only about two-thirds of the hiring that the agency commissioners actually want to have this year, despite that the numbers actually seem fairly optimistic. Most of the jobs that are slated to be refilled are those that service the public directly. Some of the positions that will be refilled include medical facility staff workers, highway maintenance staff and group home workers. According to figures calculated by Benjamin Barnes, the budget secretary for the governor's office, Governor Malloy has been able to save about \$55 million with this tactic. This is on top of the \$65 million that the state has already saved by making a beneficial agreement with the unionized state employees. In addition to agreeing to leaving the vacancies, the contract also has some serious downsides for the workers involved. Some of the concessions that the workers agreed to include wage freezes and changes to the pension plan. In exchange for those sacrifices the workers were promised that there would be no layoffs for at least four years. "There were critics who said that would limit our flexibility. Clearly we do have flexibility. Ten percent of the workforce under the governor's control is vacant and we're letting 3 percent of that get refilled in order to meet critical needs," Barnes told a reporter for the Associated Press. "But clearly, we have room to control costs and to reduce the state workforce, even in the context of the agreement, which I think is very encouraging." Some of the jobs that need to be refilled have already been posted. Interested parties are encouraged to apply.

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