

## Paterson: OK furloughs

100,000 state workers face a day off without pay, unions say no way

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ALBANY -- Gov. David Paterson will ask the Legislature today to approve putting 100,000 state workers on furlough without pay for one day per week until the state budget has been hammered out.

With the state budget almost a month late, the furlough plan is the governor's new cash-saving proposal as talks with the Legislature continue to stalemate.

Public employee unions are drawing up battle lines to oppose the furlough, which the governor wants to start on May 10.

"Nuts," was the one-word statement issued by CSEA President Danny Donohue, echoing the famous U.S. response to the German demand for surrender during the Battle of the Bulge in World War II.

"Gov. David Paterson's proposal to furlough state employees is illegal," said PEF President Kenneth Brynien. " ... We will take every action necessary to stop the governor's proposal."

Although details were still being worked out, state Budget Director Robert Megna estimated roughly 100,000 workers, or 70 percent of the state work force, would be subject to the furlough. Each day of furlough would save the state roughly \$30 million, he added.

The Legislature will receive the furlough bill today along with a list of \$620 million in spending cuts designed to close the widening deficit.

Health and safety workers would not be required to stay home. Management-confidential employees, who have gone without a scheduled general raise in the past two years, would also be exempt. While the governor was initially putting the proposal forward as a stand-alone bill, he would not rule out placing it in a future extender bill -- a move that would put the Legislature in the position of approving a furlough or bringing about a state government shutdown.

Megna said the proposal was in keeping with actions the governor has taken over the past several weeks to stem New York's cash-flow crisis -- including school payment delays and state-funded capital projects, as well as the delay of a 4 percent raise that went into effect for many state workers on April 1.

"We believe ... this would fall into the same mechanism in that we have the ability to do it given the fiscal crisis that we're facing, and the fact that we do not have a state budget," Megna said.

In a news conference from the Red Room of the Capitol, Paterson asked the Legislature to take up his amended executive budget proposal and give it an up-or-down vote today -- a long shot considering the major differences in the budget blueprints offered by Paterson, the Senate and the Assembly.

Megna said that while the governor was proposing the furlough as a stand-alone bill, he would not rule out placing it in a future extender bill -- a move that would force the Legislature to approve a furlough or bring about a state government shutdown.

Paterson's budget submitted in January included \$250 million in unspecified savings from state work force costs. So far, union leaders have rejected concessions.

Since the fiscal downturn began, many cash-strapped states -- from California and Massachusetts to Iowa and Oklahoma -- have used furloughs to cut costs.

Paterson's list of new deficit-closing cuts includes about \$324 million in additional spending reductions, approximately \$100 million Paterson said were proposed by the Legislature. The list also included \$211 million in revenue actions and \$85 million in other actions.

The new cuts include both large- and small-bore ideas, from a \$50 million cut to the money set aside for member items, otherwise known as pork, in the current fiscal year to a delay in the current plan to refurbish the roof of the Capitol for a savings of \$10 million.

The largest new revenue action would be a two-year reduction of business-related tax credits, which would save \$100 million this year and \$650 million in 2011-2012.

Paterson also asked the Legislature to work five-day weeks beginning Monday until a budget deal is achieved.

Since the budget deadline passed at the end of March, the Senate and Assembly have held to the pre-existing calendar and held only 11 session days. After today, they'll be gone until Monday. There are only 11 session days set for May.

Asked why he isn't forcing lawmakers to stay here in extraordinary session, as he can do by law, Paterson said, "I'm trying not to be acrimonious."

Legislative leaders were noncommittal on both the furlough proposal and the call for an up-or-down vote on the governor's budget plan.

"The governor has the right to manage the size of the state work force," said Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, apparently referring to the governor's power to impose layoffs. Pressed on the specific question of the furlough proposal, Silver said he needed a more detailed explanation of the plan.

"We have to review the proposal before commenting further," said Austin Shafran, spokesman for the Senate Majority Conference.