

Paterson Rescinds Raises

By Ken Lovett



Under fire for granting raises to some of his own staffers while seeking 100,000 state worker furloughs, Gov. Paterson backed down this morning.

Paterson spokesman Morgan Hook told reporters, including the DN State Capitol Bureau's Glenn Blain, that the governor reluctantly decided to rescind the raises recently awarded to four in his press shop and a fifth staffer.

Hook said the governor still believes the five who received the raises deserved them because they took on added responsibilities.

"The people who are promoted will still be promoted, but they will not get a salary increase," Hook said.

He did not clarify why the decision to kill the raises was made or even who first pushed for it.

"This is an act of the administration," he said.

He did say one of the five who received a raise feared they had become a distraction and volunteered to give up the extra pay.

"Frankly, and the governor believes that this is the wrong thing to do, that we are completely in the right to give these people promotions. We have reduced the amount of money spent in the press office alone by more than \$300,000 in the last two months."

Hook used the announcement to again call on the public employee unions to forego their 4.5% raises as Paterson has requested.

"Why don't they willingly not take their raise?" Hook said.

Paterson pushed for the furloughs, which are being challenged in court, after the unions wouldn't agree to \$250 million in concessions.

The increases were to go to:

- Jessica Bassett, to \$75,000 from \$65,000.
- Anna Adams-Sarthou, to \$45,000 from \$35,000.
- Melanie Hartgraves, to \$45,000 from \$38,000.
- Margaret-Kelly McKeon, to \$75,000 from \$65,000.

A fifth, nonpress staffer in the New York City office, Elizabeth Banner, got bumped to \$60,000 from \$55,000.

Hook Wednesday again insisted the raises went to staffers who took on "substantially more responsibility" after four key aides left amid a probe by the state attorney general's office.

The five Paterson staffers already received the raise in their latest paycheck this week.

Hook said they will not be asked to return the extra money. Their salaries will be adjusted down in the next pay cycle.

Darcy Wells of the Public Employees Federation said the governor rescinding the raises after granting them "is almost worse."

"It's like he got caught and now he's acknowledging that maybe it's a good idea."

Wells said the union will not give back its negotiated raises.

"It's something the state's contractually obligated to pay our members," she said.

Officials from the state's two largest public employee unions could not immediately be reached for comment on Wednesday morning.

A spokeswoman for the Public Employees Federation on Tuesday called the raises a slap in the face to state workers in light of the state's belt-tightening measures.

"This is another example of the governor saying one thing and doing something else. What happened to shared sacrifice?" Darcy Wells said.

Next up could be a court hearing today on the furloughs.