

Nassau Exec Retreats On Bid to Annul Labor Pacts

By MARK TOOR | Posted: Monday, October 24, 2011 5:00 pm

Nassau County Executive Edward P. Mangano Oct. 21 withdrew a bill that would have allowed him to unilaterally scrap labor contracts, four days after members of the county's public-employee unions were joined by labor leaders from around the state in a noisy protest against the legislation.

James Carver, president of the Nassau Police Benevolent Association, had told the crowd of roughly 3,000, "By proposing the Fiscal Crisis Reform Act, Mangano is showing his contempt for the U.S. Constitution."

Actions 'Anti-American'

"His actions go against the very foundation of what we Americans pledge to defend each and every day," said Jerry Laricchiuta, president of the county's largest union, the Nassau Civil Service Employees Association, which lost 128 members to layoff in July.

Even while backing off on the legislation, Mr. Mangano insisted that union leaders agree to \$150 million in concessions by Dec. 15 or he would impose layoffs and furloughs.

Mr. Mangano was elected in 2009 by voters who were sick of constantly-rising property taxes. He canceled a new home-heating tax that would have raised \$40 million a year and has refused to increase taxes. Instead, he has targeted the county's workforce for savings, slashing jobs and attacking existing union contracts as not sustainable under current economic realities.

His 2012 budget proposal calls for as many as 800 more layoffs, a number he said would be reduced if union members agree to start paying 25 percent of their health-insurance costs despite contract provisions that provide care at no cost.

While squeezing the workforce, he has continued longstanding patronage practices, funneling lucrative fees and commissions to politically-connected law firms and insurance brokers, and appointing allies to high-paying county jobs.

Union officials said the FCRA, which would have let Mr. Mangano impose new salaries and working conditions at will, violated the state Taylor Law and the Constitution. Mr. Mangano's staff claimed it was legal, basing its reasoning on recent events in Wisconsin and New Jersey in which provisions of labor contracts were overridden by legislation.

'Wisconsin to Jersey to Nassau'

Patrick J. Lynch, president of the city's Patrolmen's Benevolent Association, was one of the union leaders from outside the county who attended the rally. He said Mr. Mangano wanted to solve the county's fiscal problems on the backs of police officers. "This trend began in Wisconsin, spread to New Jersey and is now facing Nassau's police," he said. "We have to stop it now. Police, regardless of where they work, didn't cause the fiscal problems and shouldn't have to pay to solve them."

"There is no excuse for management to walk away from fairly-negotiated contracts and failing to act in good faith," said Danny Donohue, president of the state CSEA, who came down from Albany for the rally.

John R. Durso, president of the Long Island Federation of Labor, said breaking the contracts was the wrong approach. "Where will it stop?" he asked. "Favoritism will replace seniority and ability. Cronyism will be the new standard for county contracts, job assignments and pay, and in the end the taxpayers won't save a nickel."

Mr. Mangano initially responded by blasting the unions, saying in a statement, "Rather than waste members' dues on t-shirts and juvenile signs, union leaders would serve their members responsibly by getting their butts to the negotiation table. The fact remains if union bosses fail to negotiate, more of their members will lose their jobs or will be furloughed."

'Union Bosses Arrogant'

"It is a sad day in America when union bosses are arrogant enough to claim that asking for concessions is 'Anti-American,'" his statement continued. "Tell that to the veterans of World War II who are struggling to pay their property taxes. Tell that to the soldiers of Vietnam, Korea, Iraq and Afghanistan who struggle to live in Nassau County. How dare Nassau's union bosses insult anyone who is fighting for lower taxes!"

He sent a special valentine in the direction of the Nassau PBA, which has vociferously attacked his proposal to close two precincts and end contractual minimum-staffing requirements: "Simply put, Jim Carver's PBA fails to recognize that residents do not sympathize with members who earn six-figure salaries, work three days a week and receive 61 paid days off a year."

The unions are already working under a wage freeze imposed by the Nassau Interim Finance Authority, a state board that began overseeing county finances after it determined that Mr. Mangano's budget contained too many shaky sources of revenue. They also agreed in 2009 to a concession plan, including lag payrolls and wage deferrals, that saves the county \$50 million.