

Union: No Urgency in Talks

Layoff of State Workers Imminent, Cuomo Says

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By MARK TOOR |

Governor Cuomo has threatened to begin layoffs of as many as 9,800 state workers in the next couple of negotiations on new contracts with its two largest public-employee unions intended to save hundreds of jobs.

“We’ve been expecting that at some point he was going to make that kind of statement,” Stephen Service Employees Association, said in an interview. “He’s prepared to proceed with layoffs to in

‘Impossible’ to Get Job Done

Mr. Madarasz said that successive rounds of cuts in recent years “have really decimated the work mission in many agencies...The bloat is in political appointees, who haven’t been weeded out since

He said that the administration’s negotiators have not shown a sense of urgency and have not allowed fewer employees to complete the work. “They’re not really interested in creative savings; they’re not,” he said. “The best I can say is we’re still talking to them.”

There might be a bright spot in terms of layoffs, he said. Originally, he said, the Governor’s Office had planned for 9,800 layoffs, employees would be cut as a result of consolidations in departments such as Correctional Services. But the administration seemed to be backing off and had decided to count those layoffs in the 9,800 to 9,800 slots to get rid of and still get the work done.”

Cuomo: Layoffs Up to Labor

The Public Employees Federation, the other union bargaining with the Cuomo administration, declined to make any remarks because negotiations are continuing.

“I think we have a couple of more weeks of discussion before we actually have to start the layoffs,” he said May 20 on the Albany radio show hosted by New York Post state editor Fredric U. Dicker. “I’m not sure about savings. I really hope we can avoid the layoffs, and that’s going to be up to the negotiations at the

respective unions.”

When Mr. Dicker asked how the talks were progressing, Mr. Cuomo replied, “It’s hard to tell. The moving in the right direction, but on so many of these things, Fred, I’ve adopted a different position. It’s total agreement or there’s no agreement. And right now, there’s no total agreement, so we have

Mr. Cuomo’s press office, characteristically, did not respond to a request to clarify his comments. workforce savings in his budget and said that if he did not get it he would begin layoffs. But he has initiatives.

In his administration’s first contract, his negotiators pressured Council 82 of the New York State Law Enforcement Officers Union to accept years, limited overtime rights, raised both premiums and co-payments for health care, and reduced the number of unused sick days that could go to 50. The contract also omitted standard provisions for a giveback-laden deal such as a guarantee against layoffs and a reopener clause if it did, however, end a long stalemate and provided back pay, a situation Mr. Cuomo’s staff clearly hoped would induce union members to accept

Mr. Cuomo said this contract was the best the state could afford, and he urged CSEA and PEF to accept it. They rejected that request even before members of Council 82’s Agency Law Enforcement Services union voted on it. Some ALES members were so offended by the proposal that they are moving to decertify Council 82. Further contract talks are on hold while the representation issue is being worked out.

“There hasn’t been any urgency on their part,” Mr. Madarasz said of the state’s negotiators, noting that the talks have been going on since the end of March, once a week or maybe a little more,” he said.

Administration officials have noted in the past that the longer the Governor waits before starting negotiations, the worse the picture will be and the more will be needed.

Breaks for the Rich

“You can’t talk about economic development while laying people off,” Mr. Madarasz said. “And you can’t talk about it while asking working people to make greater sacrifices.”

Mr. Madarasz was referring to Mr. Cuomo’s rejection of proposals that he extend the “millionaire tax” which is due to expire at the end of the year. Unions and advocates for education and other social services and lay off public employees while giving millionaires a tax break.

Mr. Cuomo said that he had promised during his campaign that he would not raise taxes and that he would not raise taxes in New York. State Senate Majority Leader Dean Skelos endorses this position, but Assembly Speaker

introduced a bill earlier this month that would extend the tax through 2012 while restricting it to 1 million (the expiring tax kicks in at \$200,000 for singles and \$300,000 for families).

Mr. Dicker, in a television interview after his interview with Mr. Cuomo, said that if he were a sta

‘Ax Hasn’t Fallen Yet’

“I would think that the ax hadn’t fallen yet,” he said. “The Governor did sound upbeat on the general election, including reaching agreement with the unions, so I would be cautiously optimistic.

“I would also note that in recent weeks the Governor started using a different term. Instead of talking about 9,800 slots to be eliminated. That suggests that a lot of slots may be going or that layoffs may be retirements or people moving on to other jobs.”

The state workforce reductions included an early-retirement incentive that thousands of workers that were eliminated, it is not clear where people could move on to other jobs.

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