

Retirement Dinner Registration Closed:

Attention Retiring PEA Members: Please take notice that the opportunity to request seating at the 2010 PEA Retirement Dinner, to be held on Tuesday, June 15th, has now ended. We will not be able to take any new reservations. Thank you to all for your responses and we will now continue with further preparation for the dinner.

Staff members who have not yet announced their retirement will be tentatively included on the list for next year's dinner, assuming the Association can hold another dinner.

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State Fiscal Woes Block Needed Changes

Parties hash out N.J. budget deal

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BY CLAIRE HEININGER AND LISA FLEISHER
State House Bureau

Despite Governor Christie's painful budget cuts and months of partisan battles over his plan, an agreement is taking shape between Democratic and Republican lawmakers that would avert a shutdown of state government and save a handful of popular programs scheduled for elimination.

The plan, as described by lawmakers of both parties involved in the discussions, would leave the Republican governor's \$29.3 billion budget largely intact, preserving most of the most unpopular cuts, such as \$820 million in aid to school districts. But several smaller changes will be made that would preserve the blue laws that forbid Sunday shopping in Bergen County and could send more money to public libraries.

The deal would also entail a legislative maneuver placing responsibility for the budget on Republican lawmakers, a rare move with Democrats controlling both houses of the Legislature.

Lawmakers were reluctant to speak openly about specific programs and stressed the talks are not final. But they were emphatic about their goal - to pass a budget on June 24, a week ahead of the July 1 deadline for Christie's signature. "There's little appetite for a government shutdown on either side," said Sen. Kevin O'Toole, R-Essex, a member of the budget committee.

Senate President Stephen Sweeney, D-Gloucester, said there is "very serious discussion" about minority Republicans taking the lead on drafting and sponsoring the budget legislation, a role usually left to the majority party.

If Republicans take charge, only the minimum number of Democrats - four in the Senate, eight in the Assembly - would likely join the GOP in voting for the plan, lawmakers said. While Democrats would still control the timing of the budget votes - and several companion bills needed to accomplish Christie's proposals - it would allow them to keep some political distance from the governor's plan.

"It's a Republican governor, and some people really dislike the bill so much, some people feel Republicans should sponsor the budget based on how bad it is," Sweeney said. "We have a responsibility to pass a budget. Unfortunately, we have to provide votes for this budget. That doesn't mean we like it or agree with it."

GOP leaders said they are glad to own Christie's first budget, despite deep spending cuts to such items as school aid, pension payments and property tax rebates.

"If the Democratic majority is unwilling to lead, we are certainly willing to do so," said Senate Minority Leader Tom Kean Jr. of Union, who acknowledged the budget has "very difficult decisions" and still needs "fine-tuning" even from the GOP side of the aisle.

From the time Christie introduced the plan in March - and through dramatic budget hearings where those hit by the cuts aired their concerns - the governor stressed lawmakers could make adjustments as long as they did not violate his "core" beliefs about smaller government.

Christie has been dismissive of the possibility of a government shutdown, meanwhile laying the groundwork to blame the Legislature if it were to occur. Sweeney, though, said Democrats are not interested in shutting down the state over a budget stalemate, as happened in 2006.

Before June 24, lawmakers and Christie's office will hammer out changes on items like state aid to libraries, which saw a 74 percent reduction - \$10.4 million - under the governor's plan. Legislators on Friday submitted their wish lists for what to save, including a resolution by Sens. Michael Doherty, R-Warren, and Richard Codey, D-Essex, to keep open Hagedorn Psychiatric Hospital in Hunterdon County.

"There's not really that much to fight about, because there's no money," said Sen. Joseph Kyrillos of Monmouth, a Christie adviser.

Lawmakers said there is bipartisan support for preserving the Bergen County blue laws, which would require finding \$65 million elsewhere in the budget.

Christie has said he is open to that change. Stores in Bergen County are required to remain closed on Sundays, which the Christie administration estimates costs the state \$65 million in sales tax.

Claire Heininger and Lisa Fleisher are reporters for The Star-Ledger. Matt Friedman contributed to this article.

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Chances for Saving Jobs Rest in Your Hands

Well, fingers actually. Neither the Democrats nor the Republicans in the State have the courage to take bold steps to save the jobs of probably thousands of school workers throughout the state. While the local tax rates continue to rise, even with all of the layoffs, the State's unemployment funds are going to take an incredible hit as RIF'd staff join the almost 10% unemployment figure.

The only options for saving jobs now rest in the hands of our Congressmen and women in the form of the President's "Keep Our Educators Working Act". This package would save and create hundreds of thousands of education jobs.

S-3206, the "Keep Our Educators Working Act", has just been sponsored by Senator Tom Harkins (D-Iowa) out of the Appropriations subcommittee. The companion bill, HR-2847, passed in the House back in December. Urgent action is needed to obtain support and co-sponsors in the Senate to get it passed.

Passage of this bill would mean \$630 million to New Jersey in order to save 13,400 jobs that are threatened by Gov. Christie's cuts right now.

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2) Type your zip code in the box that says "Action Alert"

3) Click the last red arrow at the bottom right to send the talking point "Co-sponsor and Support"

4) Fill in your personal information at the bottom for New Jersey to get credit from NEA

5) Click "Send Message"

It may take about six minutes total to e-mail both Senator Menendez & Senator Lautenberg - a quick and easy way to earn \$105 million per minute to save educational jobs in New Jersey!

Our goal is to have every member e-mail both Senators! The future of education in Paterson literally rests in your hands. Do it today!!!

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