

## House Republican Press Release

January 12, 2009  
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### REPUBLICAN COMPROMISE FOCUSES ON UNION RAISES



**Hartford** – Republicans will offer a compromise proposal Wednesday delaying the approval of arbitrated union contracts until June 3, 2009. Under current law, the legislature has only 30 days to act on these agreements which make up a large portion of the overall state budget.

The proposal, Republicans said today in a Capitol press conference, is critical because of the state's \$343 million deficit in the current year, and a massive \$6 billion estimated shortfall over the next two years. The Democratic-controlled legislature typically allows public employee arbitration awards to take effect without a vote, which the law allows. No contract has been rejected since 1996 but Republicans insisted their compromise is essential to solving the budget crisis.

"We have all agreed, Democrats and Republicans, that together we must solve our fiscal crisis and we cannot conduct 'business as usual.' If we are serious, right now is the time to back up that rhetoric. If we don't pass this legislation, we will be locked into billions of dollars in personnel expenses and increases before the budget-cutting process even begins," House Republican Leader Lawrence F. Cafero Jr., of Norwalk said. The House and Senate will offer their plan on Wednesday to prevent a contract with pay raises for about 5,000 corrections officers to take effect. The \$87 million agreement will become law absent any legislative action.

Cafero did not question whether the 8 percent salary increase over three years is warranted, only whether the state can afford the raises because of the deficit. But this contract could have implications for 11 other union contracts that expire by June 30.

"For weeks, in the face of multi-billion dollar budget deficits, legislators on both sides of the aisle have been talking about the need to make 'tough decisions.' This is one of those tough decisions and it's one we must make," said Senate Republican Leader John McKinney of Fairfield. "I am keenly aware of the vital role corrections officers play in our communities, having witnessed first hand the work they do at Garner Correctional in Newtown. But, we owe it to the thousands of Connecticut residents who have lost their jobs and the families across our state who are struggling to make ends meet to consider these decisions within the greater context of our deepening recession and growing budget deficits."

McKinney said, "If we allow this pact to become law without considering it within the context of our budget crisis, the next union up for negotiation may be penalized simply because their timing was bad and there isn't enough money to go around. That's why we

should look at all of the union pacts collectively and as part of the overall budget negotiations. We believe this is the best way to assure fair compensation for *all* union employees, without threatening our investments in other critical areas, including transportation, education, public health and other aspects of public safety."

"This is not about the corrections employees or the unions. The arbitration was based on a surplus we had last May. If this contract becomes law, Connecticut will be in a much deeper fiscal hole that we won't get out of without massive layoffs, huge service cuts, tax increases or a combination of all three," Cafero said. The Republican proposal will re-set the timetable and allow for greater budget discussions, he added.

McKinney and Cafero noted that Gov. M. Jodi Rell has asked the legislature to set aside the deal while her office talks with all public employee unions about how all sides can clean up the fiscal mess.

The Appropriations Committee is expected to take up the contract in a public hearing in the next few weeks but is not even required to act. The arbitration award then goes to the House and Senate.

"There is a history of silence when it comes to these contracts. We cannot afford to abdicate authority," Cafero said.