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Doyle will fund payhikes

Says he'll include money in budget

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Gov. Jim Doyle is prepared to fully fund state employee contracts as negotiated with the unions in the upcoming budget, he wrote in a letter today to Senate leader Mary Panzer.

Assembly Speaker John Gard, R-Peshtigo had said state employees would face additional layoffs if the tentative labor agreements are approved, adding that he would not support the contracts without an explanation from Doyle about where the money would come from.

But Doyle wrote in his letter to Panzer, R-West Bend, that he was "prepared to deal with the fiscal consequences of the contracts whether the Legislature approves the contracts or votes against them." "In either case, the budget I propose will be balanced and will not raise taxes," the governor wrote. Both houses of the Legislature and Doyle must approve the contracts for them to go into effect. Doyle said the contracts would be paid for through a combination of taxpayer money and program revenues. He wrote that he was preparing his budget for the two-year period beginning July 1 to allow enough money to pay for the contracts as they have been negotiated.

The Legislative Fiscal Bureau estimated that the contracts would cost \$66 million for the current fiscal period, which ends June 30. The Fiscal Bureau estimated the contracts would cost \$124.7 million each year of the two-year budget Doyle is now crafting.

Republicans have frequently called on Doyle to say whether he wants the contracts approved, but he again wrote in his letter that the decision rests with the Legislature.

Attorney General Peg Lautenschlager said last week that Doyle has no role in settling the contracts, which were negotiated between the unions

and the Republican administration of former Gov. Scott McCallum.

The state will have a \$452 million deficit by July and a \$3.2 billion deficit by the end of June 2005 if corrective action isn't taken, the Legislative Fiscal Bureau said.

Gard said Monday that "I am personally prepared to send the contracts back. As much as I'd like to approve them, we don't have the money. If we give them the contracts, we'll have to lay off more people."

But Marty Beil, executive director of the Wisconsin State Employees Union, said the union would not renegotiate. The union has not sanctioned any job actions so far, but employees are upset, he said.

Gard said that he hoped the contract issue could be resolved this week. He also touted several Republican bills that he hoped to push through the Assembly in its sessions today and Thursday.

Among them is a bill introduced by Rep. Mark Pettis, R-Hertel, that would prohibit state agencies in the executive branch from filling more than 80 percent of the total number of full-time equivalent positions that become vacant during the fiscal year. The Fiscal Bureau estimated savings from the bill at \$915,000 per year.

Other bills to be considered by the Assembly would:

Ban trading legislative action for political contributions.

Protect the rights of Wisconsin residents to hunt, fish and trap. This is the second consideration of a constitutional amendment that would have to be approved by the state's voters.

Reduce limitations on credit unions and banks. The bill would ease membership requirements for credit unions, expand services they may provide and

expand the types of organizations in which they can invest. The bill also would create a "universal bank" that would have capabilities more like federal financial institutions than state banks, savings and loans or savings banks.

Require the Joint Committee on Finance to control the 16 percent of fishing and hunting license fees that can be spent on Department of Natural Resources administration. Gard wants to make sure that the money is spent on administration related to fishing and wildlife.