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## Lawmakers set hearing on 15 pacts

*Deals call for raises ranging from 1% to 2.5%*

By Matt Pommer

With a lawsuit hanging over their heads and a Monday court date looming, legislative leaders have started the ball rolling on 15 stalled state employee labor contracts covering more than 31,000 workers. I

The leaders scheduled a hearing for Thursday at 2 p.m. before the Republican-controlled Joint Committee on Employment Relations (JCOER).

Such a hearing is required by law before the contracts can be sent to the Legislature for approval or before the committee sends them back for re-negotiation.

The labor contracts were negotiated by the McCallum administration, including major ones negotiated after Jim Doyle won the gubernatorial election over Gov. Scott McCallum.

Last week two unions filed suit in Dane County Circuit Court challenging the lack of action by JCOER. A hearing on the suit is scheduled for Monday.

Senate President Alan Lasee, R-DePere, and Assembly Speaker John Gard, R-Peshtigo, the committee co-chairs, have criticized the contracts as being too expensive in light of the state's projected multibillion-dollar general fund deficit. Doyle has urged the committee to act on the contracts.

The major contracts call for a 1 percent raise retroactive to mid-2001, a 2 percent raise retroactive to mid-2002, and a 2.5 percent raise this coming spring. Many of the unionized workers have not had a pay raise in 30 months.

Also on the committee schedule is McCallum's lame-duck proposal to increase pay for non-union workers and elected officials.

On Tuesday the Legislature's Joint Finance Committee took up Doyle's emergency bill to trim \$161 million in spending from the 2002-03 state budget.

Administration Secretary Marc Marotta told the committee the state is in a fiscal crisis that amounts to a terrible situation, but he was mum on details of how Gov. Jim Doyle plans to solve it, despite Republican attempts to pry out details.

Doyle sends his biennial budget to the Legislature next Tuesday, and a leading Republican senator predicted it would have far-reaching cutbacks.

"Everybody is going to be hit, and it's going to be deep," said Sen. Alberta Darling, R-River Hills, co-chair of the Joint Finance Committee.

The exchanges came as the committee began reviewing Doyle's bill to reduce the 2002-03 general fund deficit by \$161 million. Marotta called it a "down payment" on the huge deficits facing the state. The latest estimate of the 2003-05 general fund deficit is \$3.2 billion.

Marotta said the administration's goal was to eliminate the general fund deficit by June 30, 2005, "without any tax increase and without any crazy tricks." But he offered little detail, leaving that to Doyle's speech to the Legislature next Tuesday.

For most state agencies the reductions in the emergency bill equate to a 12-percent cut in operational spending for the final four months of this fiscal year, Marotta said. The Doyle administration wanted to "get as big a head start" as possible on solving the deficit.