



Collective Bargaining Updated

The House approved legislation this week to expand the list of items that either management or workers could choose to include in collective bargaining negotiations for government workers and public school teachers. The intention is to give all sides involved in public sector collective bargaining the same bargaining rights that private sector contract negotiators already have. For the public sector, current law only requires that certain items can be brought up for discussion during contract negotiations, including wages, holidays, vacation, seniority, transfers and job classifications. Other items can be added to the list of discussion items, but only if both sides agree.

The House-approved legislation expands the list of discussion items that either side can raise to include overtime pay, health and safety issues, evaluation procedures, shift differentials, uniforms and equipment, staffing levels, in-service training and preparation time, class size (for educators), grounds for discipline and discharge, and certain other items. With current law, I've seen where some peace officers have had to pay for their own protective gear and firearms, which I think is unfortunate; this legislation would at least allow peace officers to bring this into the negotiations.

The effect of current law is that any item not listed in statute as a negotiable item can be used as a bargaining tool against whichever side wants to introduce that item into contract discussions. For example, if a local government wants tougher employee evaluation procedures, under current law the public workers' union can refuse to even allow the issue to be discussed. Or if a union negotiator wants to talk about higher overtime pay, under current law the employer can hold out for some concession in return just for allowing overtime pay to be discussed during contract negotiations.

"Open scope" bargaining doesn't mandate that either side give in on any bargaining issue; it merely expands the list of issues that either side can raise during contract negotiations. The intention is to try to minimize the amount of "horse-trading" that goes into preliminary contract bargaining and to level the playing field for everyone involved. This is what private sector bargaining already allows, and similar to what public sector negotiators in 34 other states already have. It's an overdue updating of a law that has served Iowa well for three decades and which continues to prohibit public employees from going on strike.



One of my goals as Speaker of the Iowa House of Representatives is to keep community leaders and organizations informed about the issues facing the Iowa Legislature.

Legis.News is my way of giving you a brief insider's look at what is happening at the State Capitol. I hope you will find it interesting and informative.

Pat Murphy

Insurance Coverage for HPV

The House of Representatives passed legislation to require individual or group health insurance policies to provide coverage for vaccinations for the human papilloma virus (HPV), which can cause cervical cancer in some cases. This legislation is expected to have little or no impact upon health insurance rates in Iowa because most insurance in Iowa apparently already covers the HPV vaccination. It doesn't require anyone to receive the vaccine. But if we can encourage more women to get vaccinated, that's one less person at risk. The bottom line is that cervical cancer is preventable and we need to do what we can to encourage Iowans to protect their health.

According to comments from Rep. Janet Petersen of Des Moines, who managed the legislation on the House floor, the vaccine is nearly 100 percent effective in protecting against the four most common HPV infections that can lead to cervical cancer. The vaccine involves a series of injections that can cost hundreds of dollars out-of-pocket, if not covered through insurance. She said that the legislation is intended to help make sure that the HPV vaccine remains available and affordable to as many Iowa women as possible.

The federal Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends the vaccine for girls as young as age 11. What's particularly troubling is that this virus doesn't have many symptoms or side effects, so most people that have HPV don't even know it. Moreover, cervical cancer does not exhibit symptoms until the disease is advanced. Nationally, the CDC estimates that 20 million Americans currently have the HPV infection, and that 11,000 women in the U.S. will be diagnosed with cervical cancer in 2008. Forty-five women die each year in Iowa from cervical cancer.

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