

Holidays should be on table: legislators

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Body

HARTFORD - As lawmakers push state employee unions to negotiate concessions to their benefits package, many legislators agree paid **holidays** should be among the perks under consideration.

"That's one part that should be on the table, no question about it, because you want to do the things that hurt people the least so we can all benefit from the state being in a positive fiscal situation," said House Minority Leader Themis Klarides, R-Derby.

None of the lawmakers interviewed by the Journal Inquirer said the state needs to reduce the number of state **holidays**, but they all agreed it should be part of any discussions should state employees agree to reopen their benefits agreement.

Today, in observance of Good Friday, is one of 12 paid **holidays** when nonessential state employees don't report to work, at a payroll cost of \$8 million a day.

Other such **holidays** are New Year's Day, Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Memorial Day, the Fourth of July, Labor Day, Columbus Day, Veterans Day, Thanksgiving Day, and Christmas Day, as well as observance of the birthdays of presidents Abraham Lincoln and George Washington.

Senate President Pro Tem Martin M. Looney, D-New Haven, said he expects that paid **holidays** would be among those that Gov. Dannel P. Malloy's staff would bring up during negotiations.

"It makes sense in this difficult time to look at that issue," Looney said. "I wouldn't specify which or how many, but it should be on the table."

Devon Puglia, a spokesman for Malloy, declined to comment specifically on the prospect of reducing the number of paid **holidays**, but reiterated the governor's call for state employees to reopen their benefits agreement, which doesn't expire until 2022.

"We don't negotiate through the press or discuss specifics, but obviously we believe that there must be concessions to help mitigate cuts in services and alleviate the number of layoffs necessary," Puglia said. Malloy and legislative leaders are negotiating more than \$200 million in budget cuts for the current fiscal year, and projections for next year peg the shortfall at nearly \$900 million.

The **State Employee Bargaining Agent Coalition**, which negotiates the benefits package for all state employees, has rebuffed calls to reopen the agreement, including a formal request last week by Malloy's top labor adviser.

Two spokesmen for SEBAC declined to comment, but various unions, through internal communications, continue to suggest that officials raise taxes instead of seeking concessions or laying off state employees.

Matthew Fox

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"State employee layoffs and service cuts will wreck Connecticut's economy, causing havoc and pain for all our members, whether they work for the state, for cities and towns, or for private companies," AFSCME Council 4 Executive Director Sal Luciano said in an update on the union's website.

AFT Connecticut President Jan Hochadel said in a memo to members that was obtained by the Journal Inquirer that Malloy's call for concessions and layoffs is "like rushing into surgery without considering less other, less invasive options."

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