

WA State Workers Say "No Thanks" to Furlough Days

Local News

Posted by: David Haviland

Posted on : June 17, 2010 at 5:31 am

OLYMPIA, Wash. - State employees and negotiators for the state of Washington are in contract talks that, so far, don't appear to be going smoothly. One issue that will soon be coming is unpaid furlough days. The state of Oregon is already requiring some of its workforce to take mandatory unpaid days off. Friday is "day five" of ten furlough days there.

Ken Allen, Oregon executive director of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Council 75, says so far, most workers would rather be on the job and getting paid.

"There's a bitterness that comes up each time the day comes around - I mean, people are mad again. That's not a good thing. The work doesn't go away; they just have more work when they come back from their furloughs. The clients don't like it - it's an inconvenience for them."

Allen headed the negotiating team for Oregon state workers and says, in some institutions, furlough days haven't resulted in the desired cost savings because the state has had to pay more overtime to keep them staffed. He knows the furlough issue will come up again in future bargaining.

"We represent plenty of members who are eligible for food stamps, single parents - and even five furlough days a year is a big economic impact on them. And so, this is a one-time thing for us. I don't ever see us doing it again."

In Oregon, some agencies shut down altogether on furlough days, while others allow individual workers to pick their own days off and remain open with less staff. The Washington Legislature has ordered state agencies to save \$48 million through pay reductions or furloughs.

The Washington Federation of State Employees says some agencies would be exempt from a furlough requirement, including the state ferry system, prisons and law enforcement. The issue will be on the bargaining table starting July 6.