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County and CSEA Contract Negotiations at a Standstill

Mayville:-- Chautauqua County Executive Greg Edwards announced his disappointment about being unable to come to a deal with the local CSEA union after CSEA officials declared on Wednesday that their negotiations with the County are at an impasse.

In 2008, the County and CSEA entered into a four-year contract, which expired on December 31, 2011, that gave CSEA employees a pay increase for four consecutive years.

Since August of 2011 officials from both sides were working to come to an agreement, but now the Public Employment Relations Board will assign a mediator to come in and work to try to facilitate a deal.

County Officials involved in the negotiation process said back in August Chautauqua County and CSEA began negotiations as each brought simultaneous offers to the table.

The County had proposed a four-year contract with no salary increase for 2012 and 2013, a one time \$500 cash payment for 2014, and a 1% pay raise in 2015. The County also proposed a High Deductible Health Plan, a freeze on the step pay rate annual increase, an end to the annual sick pay bonus, and an end to longevity pay, which gives CSEA employees a minimum of \$400 extra per a year after they have 10 years of service.

CSEA's initial proposal was for a five-year contract with a five percent pay raise to everyone's salary for each year from 2012 to 2016. They also proposed no changes in health insurance, move all employees to a 40- hour work week instead of a 35 to 37 hour work week, add Black Friday to the existing 12 Federal/State paid holidays, and add another vacation day to the minimum of 13 days available at the end of a person's first year of service. Other terms included a no layoff clause from October 2011 to December 2013, and keep steps, longevity, and the sick bonus, which gives an additional \$115 per every four month period to an employee who doesn't use sick days.

In CSEA's proposal, employees with 1 year of experience would have a minimum of 42 days off work with pay per year and senior employees would have approximately 55 days off with pay per year, with the current average pay for a CSEA employee over \$40,000 per year plus benefits.

"If no changes were made to the old contract, we would be facing a \$2.7 million increase in pay, health insurance, and pensions for CSEA employees from 2011 to 2012," said Edwards. "Our offer was an effort to eliminate what would be a \$2.7 million expense for our taxpayers."

Edwards also said that as a comparison, virtually all of the County's non-union employees have had their pay frozen for three consecutive years and have been participating in the High Deductible Health Insurance Plan.

When asked about local CSEA Union President Rose Conti's allegations of not being able to come to an agreement due to "purely political reasons," Edwards said these allegations are baseless.

"State CSEA President Danny Donahue, who oversees the Local CSEA President, just settled the New York State CSEA four-year contract with no pay increase for three straight years, 7 days off without pay, and a significant increase in State CSEA employees' contributions to their health insurance," said Edwards.

"That deal was struck after Governor Andrew Cuomo threatened to layoff 3,500 CSEA workers," said Edwards. "Even more interesting is the fact that at least three other State Unions have agreed to contracts in the last two months with three consecutive years without a pay increase, furlough days, and increased contributions for health insurance. No one has alleged 'politics' in the State CSEA."

"In my opinion, I have been negotiating at least as fairly, and likely offering more latitude than offered to Mr. Donahue," said Edwards. "My goal continues to be to provide a place where the approximately 934 full time CSEA employees can work, earn a fair wage, receive fair benefits, contribute to the welfare of all who live here, and at a cost that the taxpayers of Chautauqua County can afford."

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