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**LAS VEGAS SUN**

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# Public employee reform bill advances

**The Associated Press**

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The Nevada Senate voted Thursday for a bill to reduce public employee and retiree benefits and enact benefit reforms \_ steps that Republicans have demanded in exchange for their votes to override a veto of a \$781 million tax increase.

The changes in SB427, now moving to the Assembly for final action, tighten benefits for new employees and retirees and change rules collective bargaining on pay and benefits.

Many of the changes were requested by the Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce and backed by Republicans in the Assembly and Senate, both controlled by Democrats. Union representatives also were involved in the negotiations over the past few weeks.

"I believe that the provisions in this bill are a major shift for new employees going forward," said Senate Majority Leader Steven Horsford, D-North Las Vegas.

Sen. Bob Coffin, D-Las Vegas, was the only committee member to vote against the measure, complaining that the changes were worked out among too small a group.

"There's more than two parties here," Coffin said. "It's not just the business group and legislators. We have to consider the other folks that are affected."

"I would take issue with the insinuation that business community took control of the debate," said Sen. Warren Hardy, R-Las Vegas, involved in closed-door negotiations until he stepped away due to a perceived conflict of interest. "I will say that every meeting I attended was full of people from both sides, including public employees."

On retirement, the bill would change the "multiplier" used to calculate the percent of public employees' salaries they get after they retire. Currently, for every year of work employees are entitled to 2.67 percent of their yearly pay, to a maximum of 75 percent. That "multiplier" changes to 2.5 percent for new hires.

The bill also reduces cost-of-living adjustments for retirees. Currently, retirement payments increase by 5 percent per year, but that would be scaled back to 4 percent per year.

The bill also changes the date that new employees are eligible to retire. Currently, those employees hired before 2010 can retire at age 65 if they have at least five years of service, age 60 if they have 10 years of service, and at any age if they have at least 30 years of service.

For new employees, those requirements would change so that those who have at least 10 years of service can't retire until they are 62 years old.

"It's drastic policy changes that the Las Vegas Chamber was looking for," said Dennis Mallory of AFSCME Local 4041. "I think we've done as much as we could to minimize the impacts. It was the best we could do to get the budget passed without falling back on the governor's budget. We're certainly not happy about it."

The bill also would take public employees 15 years instead of five to get a health insurance subsidy. Sen. Bob Coffin, D-Las Vegas, suggested amending that part of the bill so that university employees would only have to wait 10 years, but the motion failed.

"It kicks the universities in the teeth when they've already been hit hard," Coffin said.

If a collective bargaining agreement isn't resolved after six rounds of negotiations, the dispute could be submitted to an arbitrator.

Also, a local government contract would have to have a full fiscal hearing to ensure the public know the costs and terms of the contract.

"Our local government employees are paid substantially more if they're doing the same job as someone working the same job at the state level, and we don't think that gap makes sense," said Steve Hill of the Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce. "State employees haven't been considered in these negotiations in the past. So considering them now will, we think, bring some fairness."

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