



State Employees Association of North Carolina • www.seanc.org

LEGISLATIVE Update

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Leonard lays out the case for across-the-board employee pay raises

Lawmakers can't repair a leaking boat one hole at a time

Last week Gov. Pat McCrory gave legislators his \$51.7 billion spending plan for the next biennium. Of that, \$21.5 billion is budgeted for the 2015-16 fiscal year. And while it contains a proposed salary increase for correctional officers and Highway Patrol troopers and other employees earning below their market rates, there are no proposed across-the-board pay increases or retiree COLAs.

This week, [lawmakers had their first chance to review this proposal with the governor's budget director](#) and discuss the state employee salary proposals. And while Rep. Gary Pendleton (R-Wake) was one of several lawmakers who were very supportive of the proposed increase for correctional officers and who suggested that even more should be done, SEANC is advocating for ALL state employees to receive a pay raise.

[Speaking on Time Warner Cable News Channel 14's Capitol Tonight program on Tuesday](#), SEANC Interim Executive Director Mitch Leonard explained that SEANC is advocating for an across-the-board raise because many state employees are making salaries that are below market rates and because "piecemeal just doesn't work."

He likened it to trying to repair a leaky boat one hole at a time – as soon as one is plugged, water will just pour in another until the boat sinks.

"We have tons of hard-to-fill positions across state government because we're really not competitive with the market in most of the positions," Leonard said.



SEANC Interim Executive Director Mitch Leonard, left, talks with Tim Bynum during an appearance on Time Warner Cable Channel 14's *Capitol Tonight* program on Tuesday.

It's an experience that SEANC's own Member Benefits Director Brenda Hooker knows firsthand, as she [told WFMY News 2 in Greensboro on Thursday](#).

She explained that the reason she left state government after 18 years as N.C. Central University's travel director was the low pay – less than what she could have been making in a similar position in the private sector.

"We were living paycheck-to-paycheck and I had a child that wanted to go to college, and I needed to pay for it," she said.

And while Leonard said he understands the pressures of a limited pot of money, SEANC's analysis of the state's budget shows there are funds available. Plus, he said, [voluntary turnover of state employees is already costing North Carolina taxpayers \\$300 million a year](#) – less than the cost of providing meaningful across-the-board pay raises.

"We still feel that we can find funds in the existing budget to pay an across-the-board increase," Leonard said.

It's a similar situation for the retiree cost-of-living adjustment, which the governor did not include in his proposal, despite recommendations from the Retirement System Board of Trustees that a modest 1-percent COLA be given based on what the General Assembly's employer contribution has recently been. But Leonard explained, that doesn't mean the state is saving that money. It just means it's being spent elsewhere.

The reason for leaving it out, the governor said was because of the low increase in the cost-of-living in the last year. However, Leonard said, that doesn't necessarily take into account the ever-increasing medical costs that many retirees face.

"We have a lot of retirees out there who didn't make a lot of money in state government, their pension benefits are very low ... and they're having a real hard time making ends meet," Leonard said.

Talk to your legislators

Now it is the time for you to [contact your lawmakers](#). The governor's proposal is not the final budget; it is the beginning of the budget process. Make your voice heard on the need for all state employees to receive a pay raise and all retirees to receive a cost-of-living increase. Together, we will work to increase your pay and benefits in the General Assembly, but we need all hands on deck— starting now.

The House is now beginning the process of crafting its budget proposal before it begins work with the Senate to hammer out any differences of opinion. As usual, the goal is to have a spending plan finalized by the start of the new fiscal year on July 1. That means now is the time for you to sit down with your state senators and representatives and help them put a face to state employees, SEANC and their constituents.

Not sure who your legislators are? [Click here](#). Curious whether they were endorsed by EMPAC? [Click here](#). Want to make note of all of SEANC's legislative priorities before talking to them? [Click here](#).

SEANC staff can also help you schedule meetings with your lawmakers and make sure you have the most up-to-date information possible about SEANC's legislative priorities, so you can have a good and productive conversation. All you have to do is let us know you're coming. Just email tbooe@seanc.org or call 800-222-2758 or 919-810-0272.

Can't make it to Raleigh? No problem. You can call, write or email your legislators – or even schedule your own time to meet with them in your hometown. Again, you can find your lawmakers and their contact information [here](#).