

Senator Paul Gazelka
Majority Leader

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Senate

State of Minnesota

May 12, 2020

Chet Jorgenson
MN Assn of Professional Employees (MAPE)
3460 Lexington Ave N
Shoreview, MN 55126

Julie Bleyhl
AFSCME Council 5
300 Hardman Ave S Ste 3
South St Paul, MN 55075

Mary Turner
MN Nurses Assn
345 Randolph Ave Ste 200
St Paul, MN 55102

Brent Jeffers
Inter Faculty Organization
490 Concordia Ave Ste 125
St Paul, MN 55103

Gary Kloos
Middle Management Association
525 Park St Ste 333
St Paul, MN 55103

Ed Reynoso
Teamsters Joint Council
323001 University Ave SE Ste 510
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Mark Grant
MN State College Faculty
55 Sherburne Ave
St Paul, MN 55103

Dear Public Employee Union Leaders:

In a normal even-year session of the Minnesota Legislature, approving the public employee union contracts would be a relatively routine task. But no one can argue that 2020 is normal.

As I write this letter, the global COVID-19 pandemic has infected 12,494 Minnesotans and killed 614 of our fellow citizens. We are now in the seventh week of Gov. Walz's stay at home order that shut down many of our businesses – some of which will not be able to return. Over 649,130 Minnesotans have applied for unemployment insurance and many have lost their jobs for good. The Minnesota Senate cancelled scheduled pay raises for our employees this year plan to institute a hiring freeze after session.

The projected state surplus of \$1.5 billion has been downgraded to a deficit of \$2.4 billion after a first-of-its-kind interim forecast published by Minnesota Management and Budget on May 5, 2020.

I believe the state budget deficit will grow substantially larger, especially if Gov. Walz extends his stay at home order past May 18, 2020.

I don't have to explain to you or your members what will happen if we face a multi-billion-dollar budget deficit next January. The state will have no choice but to slow the growth of state spending, laying off hundreds of state employees. The Minnesota economy will not be able to withstand the tax increases necessary to prevent layoffs.

These are unprecedented times that call for unprecedented solutions. I appreciate that your contracts were negotiated in good faith last year before anyone could imagine the damage a virus could do to our economy and the state budget. I believe state employees deserve the raises and benefit increases included in these contracts. But in light of recent events, the proposed contracts are not sustainable and if approved as is will lead to greater employee layoffs next year. I don't want that to happen.

I urge you to return to the bargaining table with the Walz administration immediately and renegotiate the second year of the contract to eliminate the proposed 2.5% salary increase. My Senate colleagues and I will support a modified contract that preserves the first-year increase of 2.5% already in place since July of 2019. We do not believe state employees should receive a pay cut – we just can't support an additional pay increase when the rest of the state is suffering through this COVID depression.

Knowing the budget deficit we face in 2021, the current state employee contracts are unsustainable and will not be approved by the Minnesota Senate this year. Please do what's right for the state employees you represent and return to the bargaining table this week. If we are "all in this together," everyone needs to do their part to get through these difficult times.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul Gazelka". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Senator Paul Gazelka
Senate Majority Leader

CC:

Governor Tim Walz
Commissioner Myron Frans, Minnesota Management and Budget