



Published: 02.23.2006

Teacher pay hike passes 1 hurdle

By Howard Fischer

CAPITOL MEDIA SERVICES

PHOENIX — State lawmakers took steps Wednesday toward giving a big raise to the state's public school teachers. Without dissent the House Committee on K-12 Education approved a \$2,500 across-the-board increase.

But the raises still have several hurdles before they become law. They must gain approval of another House panel as well as the full House — and, eventually, go through a similar process in the Senate.

Sen. Toni Hellon, R-Tucson, who chairs the counterpart committee in the Senate, said she opposes this approach. She said she believes teachers should be paid more. But noted this proposal does nothing to boost starting pay to attract people into the profession.

More problematic, she said, is that the proposal contains funding for just one year, with no guarantee of ongoing state financing. That means the raises could disappear the next school year.

She questioned whether the raises are little more than an election-year gimmick.

State school superintendent Tom Horne testified Wednesday in support of the House proposal, saying teachers are being asked to do more and provide more accountability to ensure that students actually are learning.

But Janice Palmer, lobbyist for the Arizona School Boards Association, had the same objections to the measure as Hellon: The measure increases the base pay for every teacher by \$2,500 but provides funding for just one year.

"After that it becomes an unfunded mandate for the school districts," she said, which would be obligated to keep paying the higher wages without the additional state aid.

Rep. Tom O'Halleran, R-Sedona, who wrote the proposal, said he plans to alter the measure so that it guarantees continued additional funding to school districts to maintain that \$2,500 boost.

That leaves another problem: Adopting the measure would take \$150 million out of the state budget.

All content copyright © 1999-2006 AzStarNet, Arizona Daily Star and its wire services and suppliers and may not be republished without permission. All rights reserved. Any copying, redistribution, or retransmission of any of the contents of this service without the expressed written consent of Arizona Daily Star or AzStarNet is prohibited.