

## **Override of UMass pay veto seen likely**

*By DUNSTAN PRIAL, Standard-Times staff writer*

Officials at UMass Dartmouth said they are confident the Legislature will override Gov. Mitt Romney's veto last week of retroactive pay raises for state employees at public colleges and universities.

"We expect the Legislature to override it," said Dan Georgianna, president of the UMass Dartmouth Faculty Federation, which represents about 700 teachers and professional staff on campus.

"There's very significant support for the pay raises in the Legislature. I believe there's a better than even chance the veto will be overridden," added John Hoey, assistant to Chancellor Dr. Jean F. MacCormack.

On Thursday, the governor vetoed about \$34 million in retroactive pay hikes for state higher education employees. It's the second time in a year he has declined to approve funding for the raises.

Last fall, the Legislative session ended before lawmakers could act to override the governor's decision.

Lawmakers are anxious to take up the issue again, said state Rep. Michael J. Rodrigues, D-Westport.

"I'm sure we will take that up very quickly. Now that we're back in session we're able to override the veto, and we will," he said.

Rep. Rodrigues said there is bipartisan support for providing the funding needed for the retroactive pay hikes.

"Public higher education is part of the solution for this state's fiscal problem. They are preparing our work force for tomorrow," he said.

In 2001, union representatives for the employees negotiated pay increases to be phased in over three years. But funding for the increases has repeatedly fallen victim to politics, starting when former acting Gov. Jane M. Swift vetoed the raises citing the state's budget deficit.

Gov. Romney in 2003 approved a \$34 million pay increase that took effect last year.

But the retroactive increases, which date back to when the 2001 agreement was signed, are still being sought. Approval for their funding requires a separate supplemental appropriation.

"This is important because it's a contract. It's no different than a contract for repairing the roof on the Statehouse," Mr. Georgianna said.

The Legislature, he added, apparently views the issue differently than the governor, seeing it as an obligation that needs to be fulfilled rather than as optional largesse.

Should the override fail, Mr. Georgianna said he's prepared to raise awareness of his members' cause through agitation.

"We'll go back to that. It's our right to do that. In fact, we have an obligation to do that," he said.

That probably won't be necessary, though, according to Rep. Rodrigues.

"We're going to keep our word. They negotiated in good faith, and a deal is a deal. They've been very patient. We gave our word and I'm sure we're going to get it done," he said.

This story appeared on Page A1 of The Standard-Times on February 28, 2005.