

Questions raised by MGEC members when voting on the 2015-2017 State Contract Offer

The point of the information put out with the contract ballot was to inform members about the state's last proposal and share the MGEC Board's recommendation. Questions posed by members frequently suggest they would like to know more about the proposals MGEC made. Those proposals may change or be modified with each pass.

Member's priorities have long been maintaining the good insurance coverage and low rates paid by employees and improving wages to be in line with other employers. There are several ways to improve total take home pay: higher hour rate, greater maximum pay, more steps, better employer match for deferred compensation, vacation cash out, premiums for licensure, longevity pay and so on. Usually only a few of the proposal are known to members as proposals are fluid during the process. Once an agreement is reached, worksite MGEC meetings inform members of the outcome but also discuss some of the many proposals and exchanges as background.

In arbitration MGEC primary focus will be to seek improvements to wages. The 2.5% ATBs for all employees are the baseline. Compensation studies show that higher wages for those shown to be behind (see www.mgec.org > Compensation Study) in positions requiring a license will be a main focus that can be justified and accomplished in a variety of ways. Raising the maximum compensation range one level for Senior Engineering Specialists is another goal. Keep in mind, bargaining is a long term process. MGEC members face artificial wage constrictions due to wage compression with managers and those in the commissioner's plan. So whenever gains are made for some MGEC members, that helps open the door for others gains in future years. The same can be true now that the Governor has raised pay for his commissioners. In summary, MGEC will seek to persuade the arbitrator to provide wage increases for all members that are greater than those of the State's last best offer. We'll also work to educate MMB, the administration, legislators and the Governor why such increases are needed.

Here are some of the questions raised by members and short answers. Feel free to contact MGEC with questions or when longer answers are needed.

Q: Would the vacation accrual apply to former federal employees?

A: *Yes, new employees and existing employees with public sector experience already can get vacation service credit for prior employment. The state proposed that the same could apply to prior private sector experience. This would apply to positions held within one year of coming to state service.*

Q: Why is it considered a "pro" that the state is offering 100% of severance to the HCSP? I preferred the 25% cash option. Did we gain anything by accepting this?

A: *Many retiring members have wanted 100% (instead of 75%) of severance to be "pre tax" for the payroll tax savings. So retiring members with 20 years' service would get something they have sought and members with less service would continue to get 25% cash out.*

Q: Hopefully the Wage Study and adding steps to the SES series are separate issues being negotiated separately

A: *Yes, across the board wage increases are a separate proposal from increasing the maximum wage for Senior Engineering Specialists.*

Q: the information you have provided does not clearly indicate how you are trying to address the disparity for all classes. Since some classes are higher and some are lower are we offering a give and take.

A: *MGEC sought a 2.5% ATB wage increase for everyone for each year of the contract. In addition MGEC sought to raise compensation for classes shown to be paid less than what other employers pay. So overall compensation increases would not be equal, but more reflective of market rates. Arguments can be made pro and con for market rates depending on which classification you are in. Mostly this is the positions requiring licensure. MGEC has offered a variety of ways this additional compensation may be done. MGEC also sought a higher maximum pay rate for unlicensed Senior Engineering Specialists. MGEC also proposed other improved economic improvements such as greater employer deferred comp match, better vacation for those earlier in the vacation schedule and other proposals.*

Q: Can you clarify which current employees would be eligible for counting their private sector experience towards vacation accrual? Is it that you can't get it counted if you've been at MnDOT longer than a year? Or you can't get it counted if you had a year off between private and MnDOT?

A: *The latter, no private sector experience would count if there was more than a one year gap between the private sector job and the state job. But now that the contract is going to arbitration, the state has pulled this proposal.*

Q: When will we be able to contribute to the HCSP while we are employed like MAPE or AFSCME.

A: *When we are willing, as a whole bargaining unit, to set aside some amount of wages for that purpose. So far our membership has not prioritized that over wage increases.*

Q: We just accept what all the other groups get.

A: *In some contracts, there have been minor differences. This round, we're making an appeal to arbitration based on compensation studies done by MGEC with the State of Minnesota. No other bargaining units have jointly done studies to use as a basis for arbitration.*

Q: I am now hearing that there are details that were not explained the above message. About the those having a license getting \$1 across the board bump. That kinda changes the whole story. Those details should have been offered. Maybe an easy to read list comparing our vs theirs....

A: *That a good point. We did talk about the range of proposals made by MGEC at worksite meetings where requested. Keep in mind; the ballots were to present the state's proposal for a vote. All of the other proposals were currently not in the package. We hope to bring them back in arbitration.*

Q: Why no vacation to deferred comp conversion like managers plan? Many outstate MGEC employees struggle to get vacation balances below minimum each year.

A: That's a question MGEC asked the State repeatedly over the years. The State's response, they want to keep some "perks" for managers. We proposed to trade away converting compensatory time for converting vacation time to deferred compensation.

Q: Why does the contract limit Armed service credit eligibility to just 1 year between State employment. Why would prior full time armed service members who are now employed by the state not get credit for the number of full time year of armed service regardless of the break between armed service and state service.

A: The answer to your question is that the State refused to have a greater period of time between jobs. So it's a question to ask of your management and the Administration.

Q: According to the wage study, SES's are currently paid more than counterparts in other sectors. All the engineering positions are lower. I think it is time to fix the gaps of the underpaid, and not have that risked at the cost of bringing the SES's to another level.

A: Additional compensation for SES is based on 1) the HAY points being the same as Senior Engineers, 2) the work often being the same (or very similar) to that of Senior Engineer, 3) additional compensation options being proposed for licensed positions and 4) belief that the compensation study didn't accurately portray SES definition for a valid comparison.

Q: If we go to arbitration can we request 40 hours of vacation be allowed to go to deferred comp?

A: Yes

Q: Compensatory Time Increase from forty (40) hour to eighty (80) hours of compensatory time an employee can convert to deferred compensation each fiscal year. (Furthermore, there was discussion about some offices denying employees from exercising this right; the employer agreed they should comply with the contract.) Will the State put the word out or will this be another silent "well they were supposed to know this" for the last part of the above statement?

A: MGEC members who have compensatory time cannot be told they cannot convert CT to deferred compensation. Even if the employer tells thee employee to use the CT, they can still convert to deferred comp as long as they do so before CT hours are cashed out in April. MGEC will communicate this via the website and e-mail. It's already been a topic of discussion at MGEC worksite meetings.

Q: There is nothing addressing overtime. Management demands using "cuff time" instead of OT. What happens if you get sick or die? The "cuff time" will not be accounted for and you and your family will not get paid for the hours you have already worked.

A: In multiple past bargaining the employer has agreed the employee should record Compensatory Time on the timesheet and "cuff time" on the timesheet in the notes section. When the employer disallows this now, the employee should get MGEC support to hold the employer accountable. None of the parties in bargaining want unofficial compensatory time (i.e. "cuff time" or even flex time hours kept where only the employee can see them. Furthermore, most employees needing to work extra

hours should ask their supervisor for approval for such hours to be overtime (which the employee can choose to be paid or take as compensatory time). Not doing so, and donating hours without recording them, causes lower employee morale and a lack of justification when additional staffing is needed.

Q: I appreciate the time and effort of the negotiations team. I would like to understand the States explanation on why the commissioners need to market equivalent but not MGEC.

A: *Me too. We're working on educating legislators and the Governor's office about market rates, workload and cost effectiveness of state engineering staff. We had a conversation with the commissioner of MMB last week on this subject.*