



The Star-Ledger

Corzine urges Legislature to approve paid family leave

Bill to provide up to \$488 for each of 10 weeks awaits vote in Senate

Thursday, June 14, 2007

BY DEBORAH HOWLETT
Star-Ledger Staff

Gov. Jon Corzine told labor leaders yesterday he wants the state Legislature to deliver by the end of the month a bill requiring New Jersey businesses to provide paid "family leave" for employees who need to tend to a new child or a sick relative.

Speaking to the AFL-CIO's annual political convention in Atlantic City, Corzine drew hearty applause when he called for passage of the measure, which is sponsored by Sen. Stephen Sweeney (D-Gloucester), a building trades union leader, and championed by AFL-CIO president Charles Wowkanech.

"I don't always get what I want out of the Legislature. You may have noticed. But this is one issue I'm going to fight for," Corzine told the crowd of about 300 in a ballroom at the Borgata casino. "We will get it passed. I will make a wager that we will get it done before the end of the year. I'd like to see it done by June 30."

The bill (S2249) is awaiting a vote in the Senate, where Sen. President Richard Codey (D-Essex) has said he wants to further "vet" it with the business community.

The Assembly has yet to take it up. Speaker Joseph Roberts (D-Camden) has expressed support for the bill but has said it will probably have to wait for action until after the budget and the upcoming summer break.

The bill would provide 10 weeks of leave, paid for not by employers but through a 0.01 percent increase in contributions to the state's disability insurance fund. The maximum pay would be \$488 a week.

Two states, California and Washington, have enacted paid family leave. The federal government requires businesses with 50 or more employees to provide 12 weeks of unpaid leave.

The AFL-CIO convention yesterday endorsed 96 candidates for seats in the state Legislature, including 78 Democrats and 18 Republicans. Sixty-six of the choices are incumbents.

In his speech, Corzine said his administration strongly supports unions. He pointed to the recently negotiated contract with state workers, saying it offers "meaningful wage growth but also meaningful reforms."

The new contract, ratified in April and effective July 1, provides 13 percent pay hikes over four years while requiring state employees for the first time to pay a share of the cost of their health insurance.

Corzine also pointed to the increase in the minimum wage to \$7.25 an hour and said he was "absolutely committed" to fight for laws requiring even higher "prevailing wage" for some workers. "We should be at the top of the heap nationally when it comes to a living wage," he said.

After an extended ovation while Corzine crossed the stage, walking with the help of a cane, the governor prefaced his remarks by acknowledging that it was his first time back to Atlantic City since he was gravely injured in a car crash just outside of town on April 12.