

## Union leaders credit governor for pension bill compromise

by Caitlin Coakley

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Though union representatives are relieved to see the changes, they're still disgruntled it wasn't until the last minute before there was a compromise.

Jimmy Chavez, president of the Arizona Highway Patrol Association, said it was frustrating that the House Speaker Kirk Adams never reached out to him before presenting the bill. And although Sen. Steve Yarbrough did hold some meetings before introducing his version, Chavez said it didn't seem like his or other union leaders' input was being considered.

And Brian Livingston, executive director of the Arizona Police Association and one of the most outspoken critics of the pension reform effort, said that the bickering and bitterness could have been avoided if there had been more discussions from the start.

"I believe we could have satisfied all the concerns two months ago if there had been a true give-and-take," he said. "It should not have led to a two-and-a-half month debate."

The plan started as two bills: One fairly drastic proposal from Adams, and Yarbrough's bill. Ultimately, the more gradual provisions of Yarbrough's bill were preserved while the House proposal was largely scrapped.

But going with the less drastic bill wasn't enough to placate the interest groups, who argued that they feel like they weren't being considered enough in the process.

"It's only now that there's a strong possibility that the bill will be defeated that the speaker's asking us to get involved," Chavez said.

Livingston and Mike Gardner, a lobbyist for PSPRS, give the governor most of the credit for coming up with a compromise. Gardner said there has been a lot of back-and-forth in discussing the bill and what they wanted to do with it.

"Her office has been very open about picking up the phone and calling us," he said.

While Livingston is thankful for the support, he laments the fact that it took the governor's intervention to get lawmakers to listen.

"The compromises that you see were a direct result of gubernatorial intervention," he said. "Frankly, the association does not believe that either (the House or the Senate) reached out to us in a significant or proper manner."

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