

## UNION MEMBERS ANGRY OVER PATRICK COLA VETO

Retired state employees and teachers are angry and disappointed that Gov. Deval Patrick vetoed what would have been their first cost-of-living adjustment since 1997, but don't plan to use the issue against him during his reelection effort, according to a top union official. The increase had the unanimous bipartisan support of the House and Senate but Patrick's veto, announced late Friday, effectively killed the push because lawmakers, now meeting in informal sessions for the rest of the year, won't have a chance to attempt an override. "We think there would have been an override but we'll never know," Ralph White, president of the 62,000-member Retired State, County and Municipal Employees Association of Massachusetts, told the News Service Monday. White said extending by three years the schedule under which the state retires its unfunded pension liability would have paid for the increase without requiring a spike in annual state budget payments. He characterized the Massachusetts Municipal Association and "the media" as opponents of the increase and alleged that it would have cost \$1 billion and not the \$3 billion that critics alleged. "Our interpretation of the math was that it would be absorbed over life of funding schedule," he said. A system that doesn't provide a cost-of-living adjustment over a ten-year period is "not a system that's working," he said. Before he vetoed the pension proposal, Patrick sent the plan back with an amendment allowing cost of living adjustments only for employees with annual pensions of less than \$40,000, citing the "less critical" needs of individuals with higher pensions and the size of the state's unfunded pension liability. The Legislature sent the bill back after agreeing to the \$40,000 limit for one year only, after which the cost-of-living increases would be paid out on a \$16,000 wage base, rather than \$12,000, for all retirees, regardless of the size of their pensions. Patrick concluded that plan was unaffordable. Asked if the 62,000-member union would try to make the COLA decision an issue when Patrick seeks reelection, White said members were "very, very angry," but added, "For us at this time to slam the door, I would not do that. He did show some interests in trying to move forward on this."