

Panel affirms 'hands-off' stance on CSEA strike threat

By PETER HARRIGAN

Legislative leaders are planning to take no action on a wage dispute between the state and 145,000 of its employes until April 18 even though the workers are set to walk off their jobs at 6 a.m. that day.

A spokesman for State Sen. John J. Marchi of Ward Hill, co-chairman of a special legislative committee looking into the dispute, said yesterday the panel has no plans to move up hearings on the matter scheduled for April 18 and 19 in Albany.

Under law, the Legislature must resolve the ongoing wage dispute because state negotiators and the Civil Service Employees Association have been unable to reach agreement.

Marchi and Assemblyman Stephen Greco, D-Buffalo, last week asked the CSEA to defer its strike date until after the hearings on the 18th and 19th. But union officials, meeting in Albany on Tuesday, rejected that request and reaffirmed their intention to strike on April 18 unless an "acceptable" wage hike is offered before then.

The CSEA officials also

asked Marchi, Greco and other legislative leaders to hold their hearings within the next 10 days so a wage proposal could be presented to the full Legislature before the strike date.

Marchi's spokesman said yesterday the hearings are still set to begin on April 18th, and he noted the Legislature is not scheduled to return from its two-week spring recess until April 19 anyway.

"We set the dates without any attempt to provoke the CSEA," spokesman Gerald McLaughlin said. "It was decided we would meet before the Legislature returns from its recess, and at this point there has been no change in our plans."

CSEA spokesman Roger Cole said the Legislature "is asking for a strike" by refusing to hold the hearings before the end of next week.

"We set our strike date weeks before the Legislature came up with its schedule for the hearings," Cole said. "We think the legislative leaders should demonstrate the proper level of responsibility by holding their hearings ahead of their schedule."

The CSEA, which represents about 3,000 workers at state-run institutions on Staten Island, has demanded pay raises amounting to the greater of \$1,200 or 12 per cent of individual workers' salaries.

The state's latest offer, proposed on Tuesday, called for a 5 per cent raise this year and another 5 per cent hike effective next April 1. That offer has already been rejected by the CSEA.

Cole said the union's demand for \$1,200 or 12 per cent is negotiable, and noted that an offer of a 10 per cent raise "would be given very careful consideration" by union officials.

"Nothing is hard in concrete about the 12 per cent," Cole said. "We realize the possibility of getting the 12 per cent is probably not there."

The state workers set to strike on April 18 are members of the CSEA's professional, administrative, operational and institutional bargaining units. On the Island, the CSEA represents workers at the Willowbrook Developmental Center, the South Beach Psychiatric Center, the Arthur Kill Correctional Facility and at the Department of Motor Vehicles office in Tompkinsville.