

## **Senate Bill 5 could get three weeks of hearings in the House according to the Speaker.**

### **Democrat Calls for Town Hall Meetings on SB5; House Majority Says Committee Will Fully Vet**

The House Majority Caucus reiterated its assurances Thursday that collective bargaining overhaul SB5 (Jones) will receive extensive public testimony in House committee and will not require the regional hearings proposed by Rep. Matt Lundy (D-Elyria). The majority said any additional feedback from constituents around the state will be gathered by its own Republican Caucus Policy Committee, which toured Ohio last year when Democrats were pressing their own agenda.

Lundy said Thursday he is planning to deliver his bill Friday to the Legislative Service Commission under the title "Listen First."

"SB5 is calling for extreme changes to a program that has been in place for 20 years," he said during a teleconference. "These changes are being made in a matter of days. These are complex and controversial issues.... We should be taking more time for Ohioans to provide feedback on these issues. They are life-changing for many Ohioans."

Lundy said his legislation will call for regional town hall meetings including business, labor, citizens and other stakeholders. The gatherings would also draw on community meetings organized by various interested parties.

"Not everyone can take a day off and drive to Columbus and get on the witness list," he said, suggesting a generous Statehouse hearing schedule for SB5, which Speaker Bill Batchelder (R-Medina) has promised (see *The Hannah Report*, 3/2/11), would be inadequate to address a bill of such magnitude.

"When SB5 is talking about striking policeman, teachers and firemen going to jail, I certainly think the citizens of Ohio have something to say about that...." he said. "As public servants, we work for taxpayers in Ohio. I don't think we've given them the opportunity to weigh in on this issue."

Lundy took a somewhat different view of Senate hearings on SB5 than the House majority.

"I have concerns about how the process has worked thus far...." he said, expressing similar reservations about his Republican colleagues. "The majority in the House wants to get this to the governor as soon as possible.

Lundy also proposed a much broader role for the regional hearing panels, saying turnpike privatization and other big-ticket items floated by the legislative majority and the governor's office warranted additional town hall meetings.

"I wouldn't see this as a road block. I would see this as a facilitator for constructive conversation."

The speaker's office responded to Lundy's proposed legislation, saying although Batchelder had not yet seen a summary of the proposal, "there has been no shortage of testimony on SB5," said the majority caucus' communication director, Mike Dittoe.

"The speaker has indicated on several occasions that we will have very thoughtful, deliberative and extensive hearings on SB5 and other proposals coming through the General Assembly...." he said, citing the evening hearings held for several committees in the House. "I think the committee chairmen and House speaker have made significant changes to committee structures and committee times to accommodate the general public."

Dittoe did say he anticipated Lundy's bill would at least receive sponsor testimony.

Dittoe also pointed to the Republican Caucus Policy Committee that traveled around the state in the previous General Assembly to gather feedback on the evidence-based school funding model and other Democratic legislation.

"We have actually retained the policy committee this General Assembly, and the policy committee will continue meetings around the state," Dittoe said, noting former Rep. Todd Snitchler had chaired the panel, and that he had been replaced earlier Thursday by Rep. Robert Mecklenborg (R-Cincinnati). He noted that the group is not a standing committee, and that all of its Republican members are volunteers.

Ditoe allowed that, similar to Republicans' impetus in the previous General Assembly to gather feedback outside committee hearings controlled by Democrats, the new House minority might always choose to form its own policy committee to canvas the state for public comment.

"They can provide very valuable input. We're always happy to have a constructive conversation."

**Story originally published in *The Hannah Report* on March 3, 2011.**