Nevada lawmakers introduce competing equal pay bills

By Riley Snyder, AP

Nevada lawmakers are introducing competing bills aimed at closing the gender pay gap.

Assembly and Senate Democrats rallied with sign-toting supporters in front of the state legislative building earlier this week, calling on lawmakers to pass a bill requiring women and minority groups to be paid equally. State Sen. Pat Spearman introduced a bill that would incorporate parts of the Lily Ledbetter Fair Pay Act and the Paycheck Fairness Act.

“This is not something that I thought up last night,” the Las Vegas Democrat said. “This is really something that really has been in the works since before the session ended last time.”

Meanwhile, Republican Senate Majority Leader Michael Roberson is sponsoring SB167, which would empower the state Equal Rights Commission to administer fines and strengthen Nevada discrimination protection law. Roberson said his bill, which was introduced in the Senate last week, and he wasn’t aware of Spearman’s bill.

“I see a lot of press releases,” he said. “Where are the bills?”

Both proposals would allow employees who prove discrimination to collect up to two years of back pay and would allow the state’s administrative body to levy fines against employers. Spearman said her bill would create a penalty for repeat offenders and would also allow workers to collect attorney’s fees if legal action is taken.

Spearman said her bill goes further than Roberson’s and equal

pay is an area that shouldn’t be compromised.

“In the words of Dr. King, there’s a fierce urgency of now,” she said.

The proposals are based on federal legislation that extend the statute of limitations on discrimination claims and seek to reduce the wage gap by making wages more transparent and fairly allocated.

Republicans and Democrats in the Senate have introduced similar legislation on a number of issues during the session, including bond rollovers for school construction and tightening laws that forbid stalking and domestic abuse convicts from owning firearms.

Truckee Meadows Community College political science professor Fred Lokken said the maneuvering is unusual, and it could hurt Democrats.

“It’s kind of like they’re hijacking legislation and modifying it,” he said of Republicans. “The intent could be for Republicans to derail the entirety of the Democrats’ agenda.”