

## **Itching for a fight**

Reaction to the latest news about the state's crumbling revenue system (we are now short about \$1 billion over the next two years) has led to some interesting press statements from Republican legislative leaders.

While over in the Senate, Senate President Wagle and Tax Chairman Les Donovan have been saying that nothing is off the table and that the legislature needs to look at both taxes and spending cuts, Speaker Ray Merrick and his house allies are vowing to make no changes to current tax policy including scheduled reductions in the income tax. They want to focus on cuts to state programs

This is shaping up to be a battle among the various wings of the Republican party. And it won't be much fun to watch!

## **Speaker Merrick thinks public employees (including teachers) are worthless**

This from the Wichita Eagle:

"(House Speaker Ray) Merrick called delaying or reversing income tax cuts a nonstarter in an interview before the election. He argued the tax cuts would spur economic growth, while government spending would not."

"He said that former Gov. Kathleen Sebelius 'spent money like a drunken sailor' and argued that government jobs do not contribute to the health of the state's economy."

"Government employees produce nothing. They're a net consumer. And you got that cost forever and ever and ever because they're on the KPERS (pension) plan, they're on all the government insurance and everything,' Merrick said. 'That is employment to Democrats. Hire more (government employees). And that was Kathleen; she'd brag about her employment number, 'Oh, I got a lot of people employed.' Yeah, you got a lot more government employees employed. That doesn't stimulate the economy.'" Read the whole article here.

So according to House Speaker Ray Merrick, the road worker who clears the turnpike or

his residential street of snow "produces nothing." The classroom teacher, the nurse in a state hospital, the correctional officer standing guard at the prison, the highway patrol officer working an accident on the interstate - these workers produce nothing. Firefighters, police officers, park rangers, game wardens produce nothing.

According to Merrick, these "government employees" just suck the state dry with their KPERS retirement and the "government insurance." These would be the same benefits enjoyed by state legislators like Merrick himself. Do our legislators also "produce nothing?" In addition to their taxpayer funded pay, legislators also get "government insurance" and KPERS benefits.

Here's what editorials had to say:

From the Kansas City Star: "If Ray Merrick wants to see a government employee who produces nothing, he should look in the mirror."

Read more here:<sup>[1]</sup>

From the Wichita Eagle: "How did we get from that place of healthy balance to Merrick's distorted view? And how will we recover from such ignorance before it's too late?"

Read more here:<sup>[2]</sup>

### **Trabert: State should not fund benefits for teachers**

Merrick is getting help with his brutalization of "government employees" from his friend Dave Trabert of the Kansas Policy Institute. Trabert - Merrick's appointee to the K-12 Performance and Efficiency Commission - last Friday argued that if school districts wanted to provide health benefits, enhanced retirement benefits, life insurance, etc. that they should do so by raising a special local tax for that purpose and that the state should not be providing any such benefits.

Trabert showed a remarkable ignorance about how collective bargaining works in establishing a compensation package. School districts get a set amount of dollars. The Board of Education negotiates with the teachers association to produce a compensation package. In some cases, the teachers take more in benefits and less in salary. It's not a matter, as Trabert seems to believe, of districts getting extra money to pay for those

benefits. It's a matter of local people - teachers, administrators, and board members - determining what compensation package is best for the district. Trabert and Merrick are simply pushing their agenda of more cuts to school funding.

### **Pensions Committee thinking about cutting state contribution to KPERS**

The Legislative KPERS Committee met on Monday and, after hearing that returns were pretty good, starting asking KPERS Director Alan Conroy what would happen if the cut the state's obligation to KPERS funding for the next two years. They've sent Conroy away with orders to bring information to their December meeting.

You see, with the reckless tax cuts passed by Sam Brownback and his conservative legislative allies, the state is now running a deficit and massive cuts (\$1 billion over two years) are needed just to get to an ending balance of zero. So naturally, these same legislators think they might just use KPERS to pay for the tax cuts that benefited mostly the wealthiest Kansans.

They forget the fact that they just restructured KPERS to deal with an unfunded liability caused by the failure of previous legislatures to appropriately fund KPERS. The pension plan is now on track to return to actuarial balance - unless, of course, the legislature decides to mess it up again. Brownback and the Kansas Policy Institute have advocated for dismantling the KPERS pension system and turning it into an underfunded 401(k) style program.

1. <http://click.email.nea.org/?qs=2a131bb592b7b85bddc11c885ed9116a8af73b6db9cafb417bb4d56eaf08682bf0ea6966eef8d14e>
2. <http://click.email.nea.org/?qs=2a131bb592b7b85b32c4408c5c7caec33e7c96a001a1eb888a6fdcf9fe7e684b9ae99575c5f1937d>