



Free Press Viewpoint

Can civil servants really expect raises?

The nation remains in the grip of a three-year recession. Unemployment hovers near 10 percent, growth is stagnant, recovery slow. Economists talk about a possible "double dip."

In business, many have lost their jobs. Those lucky enough to have one probably haven't had a raise in three years. Many would like to have those jobs.

Times are hard, yes, but across Kansas, perhaps across the country, public employees are demanding – and getting – raises. Many times, city councils and county commissions are raising taxes to get the money.

In the middle of the worse economy, many say, since the Great Depression, who has money to pay higher taxes? Well, everyone, if you listen to the public employees demanding raises, budget increases, guaranteed jobs.

How did these people become so entitled? And where do they think the money to pay them more will come from? The unemployed?

Public employees have it pretty good. They may not make as much as factory workers or others with good unions, but then a lot of those jobs have gone overseas. Public jobs, for the most part, can't be exported.

Public employees, by and large, have better insurance and get more holidays than anyone else. We wonder how many of our readers in private business get a full 12 days off each year – other than bank employees, whose workplaces must be closed by federal regulation on holidays.

How many of you out there have full Blue Cross coverage? Have a state-funded retirement plan that allows you to retire early and take another job, while collecting a full pension?

(Forget for now the fact that many state pension funds, which cover city, county and school workers also, are badly underfunded and in danger of collapse. It'll just take another tax increase to fix that.)

Public employees have more job security, under public employment rules, than most in private business, especially at the small businesses that pay much of the tax load.

Public employees have it pretty good – but they're not satisfied with that, apparently. They want more. Whether anyone else can afford to pay is not their concern.

In Kansas, for instance, when schools faced layoffs, teachers and others banded together to force the state to raise taxes. Can't blame them. But who can afford to pay a 19 percent increase in the sales tax?

In a situation like this, an economic crisis of major proportion, that any government body would consider money for raises may seem absurd. Still, most are. Most will approve raises and push them through, raising taxes to pay the bill.

Voters ought to call for an accounting. We're not saying public salaries should be cut, but raises ought to be out of the question right now. Tax increases, especially the property tax, should not even be considered.

But until voters get mad, this will keep happening. Voters seldom go to budget hearings where these things are discussed. They don't get mad until the tax bills come out at the end of the year, and by then, the decisions have been made.

If you're happy with all that, fine. If not, maybe it's time to find out if your city, your county, your school district plans to raise spending, employee compensation or taxes this year.

If enough people ask, things might change. But it has to start with voters and taxpayers. – Steve Haynes

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Steve Haynes - Publisher
s.haynes@nwkansas.com

NEWS

Kevin Bottrell - News Editor
kbottrell@nwkansas.com

Andy Heintz - Sports Reporter
aheintz@nwkansas.com

Marian Ballard - Copy Editor
mballard@nwkansas.com

Vera Sloan - Society Editor
colby.society@nwkansas.com

ADVERTISING

Heather Woofter - Advertising Representative
hwoofter@nwkansas.com

Andrea Bowers - Advertising Representative
abowers@nwkansas.com

Kathryn Ballard - Advertising Representative
kballard@nwkansas.com

Kylee Hunter - Graphic Design
khunter@nwkansas.com

BUSINESS OFFICE

Robin Tubbs - Office Manager
rtubbs@nwkansas.com

Evan Barnum - Systems Administrator
support@nwkansas.com

NOR'WEST PRESS

Richard Westfahl - General Manager
Lana Westfahl, Jim Jackson, Betty Morris, Jim Bowker, Judy McKnight, Kris McCool

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TRICKLE-DOWN OBAMANOMICS

Fall qualifies as the sneaky season

I want summer back. I know my rights! Summer is supposed to last a whole lot longer than this.

I demand it get its sunny little rear end back here.

Not that I don't appreciate fall, mind you. Why, some of my favorite seasons are autumns. But you just can't trust fall.

Fall starts out all cool, crisp, sleep with the window open and before you know it, the furnace is on and you're up to your hubcaps in snow.

Disgusting! Fall provides us with all these beautiful, colorful leaves. Then it kills them all off, and we end up with a brown, rustling carpet all over the lawn and a bunch of bare branches.

Disgusting! Pumpkins and fresh apple cider appear in the fall. Then it freezes, and you end up with a garden full of dead tomato and squash vines. By the time you get around to removing the nasty things, they're a slimy mess.

Disgusting! There's bonfires and football and wiener roasts.



Cynthia Haynes

• Open Season

Nice, but I prefer sunshine, baseball and picnics.

Let's face it. Fall only has one purpose. It's a bait-and-switch game to lead you into winter.

Winter is heating bills, snow to shovel, short and dreary days, wet feet, cold fingers and chapped faces.

Summer is gardens, flowers, sunshine, children playing outside, swimming, vacations and long and lazy days.

OK, so it's also air conditioning, sunburn and bugs.

I can live with that.

As I look back over the last three months, I realize I didn't get to go fishing, never went swimming, rarely used our hammock and never ran through the sprinkler.

I did plant, weed, water and harvest our garden.

Steve and I did take the dog for walks at midnight, enjoy many lunchtime picnics and ate our dinner on the porch. All things I'd like to continue doing for three or four more months.

I've always liked summer best. Even when I had three children at home, I always hated to see school start each August. Summer vacation always seemed too short for all the things we wanted to do — go camping, visit the lake, take long walks in the woods and enjoy cooking outside.

So, please, if anyone out there has any influence with Mother Nature, could you ask her to be an old dear and not be in such a hurry to send summer on its way and bring on fall.

After all, you just can't trust fall. It's a sneaky season.

Cynthia Haynes, co-owner and chief financial officer of Nor'West Newspapers, writes this column weekly. Her pets include cats, toads and a praying mantis. Contact her at c.haynes@nwkansas.com

Time to reclaim hijacked education

It is time to "take back the night" in education. For the first time in history, the percentage of 20-to-24-year-olds with a college education will be lower than the previous generation. High school drop out rates are rising because students are bored.

This last decade of No Child Left Behind, the federal hijacking of education policy, has left our children with a narrow, sterile curriculum where our schools are becoming test-prep factories. In a country with the most Nobel Prizes in science, and a record of fostering creativity in the classroom, where American teachers were unique in deciding what to teach, when to teach and how to teach, schools are now forced to deliver a uniform curriculum for uniform assessments.

But Kansas students enter our classrooms as unique individuals with variable ability. They need to leave schools as unique graduates with a variety of skills. Kansas must pull out of the drive to a national curriculum, the Common Core cookie-cutter system that ironically is promoted by the National Governor's Association.

Education is indeed the major responsibility of each state, just as military defense is the responsibility of the federal government. That is not just another reason why the feds should get out of the education business, but it is also the reason why education funding remains Job One with each state. Education policy and education funding must remain in the same hands, so that so-called "visions" do not strip resources. The Federal government must stop extorting compliance for 7 cents on the dollar.

But there are those who would shortchange our Kansas students by starving state education funding. They claim to represent business and assert that every dollar that goes into state funding for education is a dollar taken from the pocket of private business. They claim that a dollar will go farther in the business sector (yes, to Bermuda and Switzerland). They ignore their debt to their own public education. Good businessmen know that the future of



John Richard Schrock

• Education Frontlines

Kansas relies on future generations of well-educated citizens.

We can save money and make education dollars go farther in three ways.

• Materials and staffing are consumed in the over-assessment of our students. It is time to eliminate all external testing — any test not developed by the teacher for his or her own use to advance the students' in-class progress.

Any farmer knows that the more we weight them, the less time we have to feed them. The U.S. already tests students twice as much as any other country and is headed for even more testing. Turning this around requires rescinding much legislation. But this will go far to re-professionalize teaching, stop the mass exodus of our best veteran teachers, and help recruit our best students as future teachers.

• Expensive technology does little more than impress parents, and that is draining resources. Every year, tens of thousands of dollars in equipment that was new just four or five years earlier becomes obsolete. The hype of technology not only exceeds its value, but we are losing large numbers of boys to video game addiction while mobile media are preoccupying students in a new social soap opera during school hours.

• School consolidation remains the "third rail" that no legislator dare touch and the state Board of Education lacks jurisdiction to promote. Yet de-populated western rural communities are consolidating by attrition. Kansas has dropped from 303 to 293 school districts in the last several years with more to come.

While small, rural schools have a wonderful sense of community, their dwindling class sizes makes them financially unsustainable.

Consolidation plans by Legislative Post-Audit and consulting firms are sterile and heartless accounting exercises, but the current voluntary consolidations based on which little district goes bankrupt next will result in a haphazard, gerrymandered system down the road. Even with small-town identity at stake, I believe commonsense rural Kansans can work together with a person with integrity and whom they trust to consolidate in a way that maintains academic quality without students riding more than an hour to school.

Teacher quality is the final issue I will address: "The company you keep is more important than the tests you take." We owe it to every Kansas child to interface them with the best teachers for their education.

Sadly, efforts to "lower the barriers" to enter teaching have resulted in lowering the standards. While some folks moved from other occupations to become good teachers, many others made a job move without gaining those skills. It takes a competent administrator to recognize and remove an incompetent teacher. But administrators must then have a pool of competent teachers for replacement. Kansas has never produced an excess of quality teachers. The rich context of a face-to-face class is important and no profession is more person-to-person intensive. Online courses are convenient but not effective except for a few "Doogie Howsers." Jettisoning No Child and alternate routes and re-establishing teacher professionalism is the biggest step we can take to "taking back the night" in education.

No governor can alone implement these changes. Jurisdictions are with legislators, state board of education members, and Kansans themselves. But the governor can lead, set the stage, and press. The common sense of Kansans should do the rest.

John Richard Schrock, a professor of biology and department chair at a leading teacher's college, lives in Emporia. He emphasizes that his opinions are strictly his own.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

