



## Taxpayers hear ringing in their ears

By Jim Waters

Gov. Steve Beshear told the Kentucky School Advocate during the gubernatorial campaign that “public employees deserve the same rights to join together and bargain collectively as employees in the private sector enjoy.”

It’s commendable that the governor is speaking of applying private-sector practices to government workers.

So far, Beshear seems content to apply private-sector practices only when doing so doesn’t disturb his political cronies in the Legislature and labor unions. The governor hasn’t demonstrated that he will maintain the same stance, even when it makes those same folks pout.

But taxpayers hear “cha-ching” when he doesn’t.

Cha-ching: Beshear favors giving state workers collective-bargaining rights. His predecessor, Gov. Ernie Fletcher, considered that economically oppressive. But does Beshear favor offering new state workers a defined-contribution plan rather than a loaded up defined-benefits plan? Not doing so is going to cause the state to slide further in the pension-deficit pit.

Cha-ching: Fletcher used an executive order to cancel the collective-bargaining agreement for state workers, the same way it started. Fletcher was right. Beshear and lawmakers sponsoring House Bill 403 are wrong. This policy unionizes state workers and uses the force of Frankfort to swell the ranks of labor unions and drive up the cost of state government.

Shively Rep. Joni Jenkins is the leading sponsor of HB 403. She’s the same politician who pooh-poohed Elizabethtown Rep. Tim Moore’s recent proposal to eliminate government-mandated wages on schools and other public projects. The Courier-Journal reported that Jenkins “urged lawmakers not to balance a budget on the backs of the working class.”

Hand Jenkins a tissue. Give taxpayers a break.

Moore’s proposal would free up more than \$100 million that the state could use to repair its crumbling schools and fund university projects. In the private sector, such obvious cost-cutting measures are no-brainers.

For private companies, cost-sharing retirement plans are no-brainers. Business owners understand that in order for their company to survive and ensure their workers have jobs, they’ve had to slow the gravy trains that drove some companies into bankruptcy and left others teetering on the edge.

Cha-ching: In his State of the Commonwealth speech, Beshear promised a plan to address the pension crisis. We’ll see if his plan structures benefits for future state hires that reflect a private-sector, 401(k)-

like approach, or if he avoids the issue altogether with short-term Band-Aids. Even if he does offer a pension plan that utilizes private-sector approaches, he would negate much of the savings by signing Jenkins' collective-bargaining bill into law.

Cha-ching: I wonder if the governor plans to use the bully pulpit to promote changes that would make it easier for lazy, underperforming and incompetent state workers, including teachers, to experience the private-sector practice of getting fired when they cannot compete.

Cha-ching: I wonder if he wants to stop state government's dole to part-time politicians sucking at the pension trough.

Cha-ching: I wonder if he plans to promote a policy that requires workers to serve the taxpayers more than 27 years before they start living for life off taxpayers.

In his next speech, Beshear could point out that such benefits are not needed to make up for the low pay of government workers, an argument as worn out as the "Welcome" mate leading to the a taxpayer's wallet, as the following facts demonstrate:

- A federal Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) report in January revealed a growing gap between public and private-workers' wages and benefits.
- USA Today reported that its analysis of the BLS data showed that from 2000 to 2007, compensation for state and local government workers grew by an inflation-adjusted 16 percent compared with an 11-percent increase for private workers.
- In 2006, public workers collected an average hourly wage of \$39.50 per hour versus \$26.09 earned by private workers.

If public employees deserve the same right to unionize as the private sector enjoys, then why shouldn't taxpayers expect government workers to get the same treatment as their counterparts in the real world?

Cha-ching.

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