



‘Occupy Public Pension Feeding Troughs’

By Jim Waters

“Fairness” apparently becomes hip only when it benefits the “Occupy Wall Street” crowd, which promotes a philosophy of wealth distribution while shunning gainful employment, respect for property and proper hygiene.

What if the OWS (Offering Worthless Shenanigans) gang knew about the corporate scam run by teachers’ unions in Kentucky? Included among the more than 1,700 organizations participating in the commonwealth’s ailing public pension system are private – *private* – organizations, like the Kentucky Education Association, the state’s teachers’ union.

Not that I’m suggesting it, but could such information lead to an [“Occupy the KEA”](#) event in Frankfort? After all, the teachers’ union is affiliated with one of the nation’s largest lobbying organizations that donate more to political candidates than many of those big, greedy corporations.

A new Bluegrass Institute policy brief – the first in a series of releases on the state’s public pension systems – reveals that KEA staff members with prior involvement in a pension plan can join the Kentucky Teachers’ Retirement System. The amount they receive when they retire and begin collecting their pensions hinges on their highest-paid years.

If a teacher made more as, say, the KEA president for a few years than during her lower-paid years in the classroom, she gets a pension based on the higher-paid years.

That doesn’t strike me as fair, unless your fairness formula also includes allowing employees in a private union cozy with politicians to mooch off taxpayers.

The Education Intelligence Agency reports that during the 2008 presidential election cycle, the nation’s two largest teachers’ unions — the National Education Association, of which the KEA is an affiliated chapter, and the American Federation of Teachers — outspent AT&T, Goldman Sachs, Wal-Mart Stores Inc., Microsoft Corp., General Electric Co., Chevron Corp., Pfizer Inc., Morgan Stanley, Lockheed Martin Corp., FedEx, The Boeing Company, Merrill Lynch & Co. Inc., Exxon Mobil Corp., Lehman Brothers Holdings Inc. and the Walt Disney Corp. *combined*.

Despite their goofy rhetoric and signs, “the occupiers” don’t seem interested in spreading the love around. At the very least, consistency isn’t their strong suit. Otherwise, they would raise a stink about the wealth, power and privilege exerted by private teachers’ unions surfeiting at public-pension spreads.

Wealth-redistributing groupies might be more interested in an “Occupy Commonwealth Credit Union” day. I might even show up for that one — considering the Frankfort-based credit union has 365 members in the Kentucky Retirement Systems.

Recently, the Lexington Herald-Leader reported that the “legislature amended state law in 1992 to allow the credit union to join KRS because [its customers are government employees.](#)”

Such reasoning demands that if employees at a private credit union with assets of \$900 million can stuff themselves on the dwindling amount of slop in Kentucky's public pension trough, then so can a greeter dispensing shopping carts at Frankfort's Wal-Mart. No doubt, many of that store's customers also are government employees.

Occupy. Occupy. Occupy.

Lots of love has been spread around in the Kentucky Retirement System, which has seen a 39-percent increase in the number of participants guaranteed a lifetime pension since 2000.

The number of Kentuckians on the pension dole is now nearly 319,000 – the equivalent of one in every 10 Kentucky adults. This benefit creep has occurred even as our unfunded pension liability has grown from \$960 million in 2000 to more than \$30 billion today.

It's appalling enough that, with the exception of some tinkering around the edges of the problem in recent years, Frankfort's political leadership has pushed the pension crisis to the side. But to continue to dig the hole deeper by allowing private entities to get a piece of the taxpayer funded pension pie?

Now, that's patently unfair to future generations of Kentuckians who will pay the bill.

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