



'Busy' hands create a devil's workshop in Frankfort

By Jim Waters

FRANKFORT, Ky. – Watch out when politicians talk about “productivity.” That productivity might come at your expense.

Kentucky General Assembly leaders describe the 2009 session as “productive.”

No doubt, a lot happened in Frankfort the past few months. So if by “productive” they mean “busy,” then I agree.

But with a busy session, comes the problem. A busy government usually means bad news for taxpayers.

The federal government’s “busy” work meant passing multibillion-dollar bailouts for banks, big business and deadbeats. Some 1,200 people showed up in downtown Lexington on a recent Saturday afternoon just to express their outrage over such nonsense. I think Kentuckians have awoken to the fact that just because politicians say they’re *busy* looking out for them, doesn’t make it so.

I’m speaking at another “express outrage” event in Paducah on April 15, Tax Day. Similar events will happen the same day throughout the state.

The Bluegrass Institute is planning a “Tax Liberation Day” on April 18 in Lexington, described as a time to “party like it’s 1773.”

Judging from the public angst, it’s a good thing our event’s handsome flier refers to the “Boston Tea Party.” Many taxpayers aren’t in the “partying” mood these days — and for good reason.

Along with shenanigans in Congress, the Kentucky Legislature and Gov. Steve Beshear’s “party line” repeatedly said the commonwealth faced a \$450-million deficit and raised taxes during the worst economic atmosphere in decades.

That brought a decision to freeze the state’s gasoline tax at its current rate of 22.5 cents. It was supposed to drop by 4 cents on April 1. Ironically, the politicians didn’t announce: “Our ‘productiveness’ is going to cost you 4 cents more for every gallon of gas you buy.”

Surprisingly, some Kentuckians who generally oppose taxes surrendered on this issue. “We need roads built and repaired,” they say. Yes, we do, which may require Frankfort making tough decisions, including *not* funding lesser-priority items.

Private business owners face similarly tough decisions. They announce layoffs and cutbacks to keep companies afloat. Most politicians will do *anything* – including jacking up taxes – to avoid difficult calls.

While the Frankfort Gang “busied” itself by raising taxes, it also “busily” gave the go-ahead for Beshear to raid \$219 million from the state’s “Rainy Day” account and \$50 million dedicated to health benefits for retirees not old enough or otherwise eligible for Medicare.

But during the pension-fund heist, the same politicians refused to approve a proposal by Rep. Joe Fischer, R-Fort Thomas, to repeal prevailing-wage requirements for public construction projects.

Many Kentuckians have lost jobs, missed mortgage payments and watched much of what they worked to save vanish. Yet, Frankfort’s politicians refuse to eliminate artificially high wages paid on public projects — even though doing so would free up more than \$250 million in the next state budget.

That could pave a lot of roads.

Government behaves “productively” only when it removes obstacles that impede liberty and the pursuit of success.

This session’s shining example of that involved getting rid of the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System, called CATS, the state’s really bad — and really costly — school testing system.

Despite what its dwindling number of ardent defenders claim, the inept CATS testing system should have been euthanized a long time ago. For one, it didn’t properly address our neediest students’ learning gaps. Minority and learning-disabled students were still being left behind. Several reports showed CATS scores were inflated.

It took 10 years, but some productive legislators finally stepped up and got rid of this hated program that prevented teachers from doing their jobs and students from getting the education they need.

If the politicians had stopped right there, it would have been a most “productive” session.

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