

State Representative

Don Hineman

Don's Legislative Update
January 30, 2016

Trouble Comes in Threes

Representative John Bradford (R-Lansing) recently introduced three bills dealing with education. I touched on HB 2504 in [last week's newsletter](#). It would force consolidation of rural Kansas school districts and would threaten the existence of many rural schools and communities. **I strongly oppose this measure**, and I have been reminding my colleagues that following the last round of school consolidations in the 1960s there was a dramatic shift in the legislature, as many incumbents were not invited back!

[HB 2457](#) would expand a program begun just a year ago to provide tax credits for contributions to pay for students to attend private schools. This runs contrary to my deeply-held conviction that **public dollars should be used strictly for public education**. If I had my way we would repeal the present statute, as it diverts dollars away from public education.

The third measure, [HB 2486](#), creates a legislative committee to approve any state assistance for local school bond projects. I am sympathetic to the fact that the state can be responsible for a share of these projects without any input or control over costs. I believe that some sort of specifications on construction may be appropriate, or perhaps a totally independent and impartial review board. **But a legislative committee is absolutely the wrong solution and is bound to lead to trouble**. Further, anything we do on this issue must in be done in a way that does not lead to inequity between school districts.

Rep. Bradford has admitted that he was not the author of HB 2504, and I have a strong suspicion that all three measures originated with the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), a national free-market "think tank" with strong ties to the Koch brothers of Wichita and the Kansas Policy Institute. In recent years the Kansas legislature has considered and adopted a number of pieces of legislation which lack a local author but which can be found in the agenda of ALEC. Do we really believe ALEC knows what is best for Kansas public schools and the students who attend them?

Kansas Association of School Boards has provided a [deeper analysis](#) of all three bills for those who are interested.

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Treating State Employees Fairly

State government is, more than anything else, a service industry. It exists to provide essential governmental services to society which private industry



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Department On Aging
800-432-3535

Child/Adult Abuse Hotline
800-922-5330

Child & Family Services
888-369-4777

Consumer Protection
800-423-2310

cannot provide. As such, it depends heavily on a dedicated and proficient public workforce to deliver those services. If state workers are too few in number, are inexperienced or improperly trained, then the delivery of those governmental services is degraded and government runs inefficiently.

Recent news reports have highlighted the growing problem. [Kansas Highway Patrol is severely understaffed](#) and recently proposed a title fee hike as a way to generate funds for a pay increase for highway patrolmen. The state hospitals at [Osawatomie](#) and [Larned](#) have made news with multiple problems which are all related to understaffing. The folks at Department of Corrections report similar labor shortages, and tell of incidences of frequent “poaching” of corrections personnel by local units of government which offer more competitive pay. A shortage of lab personnel at KDHE has forced them to outsource some of their lab work. Even the Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism is plagued by a personnel shortage of roughly 10%.

The personnel problem in state government has now grown to be systemic, and is significantly affecting the ability of state departments to deliver essential governmental services. And in the case of Highway Patrol, corrections, and state hospitals, the shortage represents a very real threat of personal harm to state employees as well as those who are admitted to state hospitals or incarcerated. Things are so bad at Osawatomie State Hospital that the federal government has stopped Medicare payments, which means the state will have substantially greater financial responsibility at that facility.

The root cause of the problem is inadequate pay. Many state employees have not received a pay raise for eight years. During the recession of 2008-2009 this was necessary and understandable, but there has been no effort since that time to “catch up” with private industry compensation levels and become competitive once again. And from the perspective of state employees, it feels like they have actually taken a pay cut in recent years. Their contribution rate into KPERS retirement has been increased and they have had to swallow an [increase in their health insurance premium](#). Cost of living raises are a thing of the past. Employees who have been hired since July 2008 no longer receive longevity pay. And all state workers deal with the stress of [possible unpaid furloughs](#) when the state budget gets tight.

In 2006 the legislature conducted a study of state employee wages to determine if workers were undercompensated in relation to privately-employed workers. The results of that study revealed some significant deficiencies, and the legislature began a three-step program to correct the problem. But the recession cut short the completion of that program, leaving discrepancies throughout the system. Some employees and departments have received the entire under market pay increase they were promised while other employees are still waiting.

The [Alvarez and Marsal \(A&M\)](#) efficiency study cited multiple instances where the state lacked sufficient expertise in-house to conduct some key administrative functions, and they attributed this to rapid turnover of state staff and inadequate compensation. In each of these cases they recommended the state turn over those key functions to a third-party administrator (work comp claims administration) or simply outsource the function (telecom expense management, fleet management, real estate property management, office printing management, database management and IT service). Here is an example of what A&M says about the problem: “Every IT organization in the state struggles to attract and retain the talent required to deliver high-quality reliable IT services.” A&M also points out that overtime labor is often the most expensive option to meet staffing needs, and yet this is exactly the approach used in recent years at corrections facilities and state hospitals.

Crime Tip Hotline
800-252-8477

Crime Victim Assistance
800-828-9745

Gov- Brownback
800-748-4408

Highway Road Conditions
511 (in Kansas)

Housing Hotline
800-752-4422

KanCare Assistance
866-305-5147

Kansas Lottery
800-544-9467

Legislative Hotline
800-432-3924

Mental Health Services
888-582-3759

School Safety Hotline
877-626-8203

Social Security
800-772-1213

Taxpayer Assistance
785-368-8222

Tax Refund Status
800-894-0318

Unclaimed Property
800-432-0386

Unemployment Insurance
800-292-6333

Vital Statistics
785-296-1400

Voter Registration
800-262-8683

Welfare Fraud Hotline
800-432-3913

Worker's Comp
800-332-0353

So with the reality of low wages and rapid turnover of staff, the essential state services which the citizens expect and demand are delivered by an inexperienced and inefficient labor force. The result is unacceptably poor service and unreasonably high cost. We should operate smarter than that. We have many very dedicated state employees who love the state and love their job. But when people feel disrespected and underappreciated they look for other options. Many key state employees have already headed for the exits and others are updating their resumes and exploring opportunities. I believe this situation has reached crisis level, and we must quite soon begin to address the problem, for the good of the workers, the good of the state, and the good of the citizens it serves.

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This newsletter is primarily intended for the residents of the 118th District (all of Wichita, Scott, Lane, Logan, Gove, Trego, and Sheridan Counties and portions of Thomas and Graham Counties). However it is available to anyone who finds it of interest. Please forward to your friends, or if you are not now receiving a FREE subscription to my newsletter, [click here to sign up](#).

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Cowboy Logic

Borrow money from pessimists -- they don't expect it back.

Quote of the day

"The first sign of maturity is the discovery that the volume knob also turns to the left." -- **Jerry M. Wright**

Sermon in a sentence

Optimists are wrong just as often as pessimists but they have more fun.

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