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Editorial: Seek buy-in from government workers in paying more for health care premiums

By Editorial Board
 Posted May 28, 2010 at 12:27 p.m.

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Back in the days when employees in the private sector got annual raises, the joke was that the single-digit percentage increase in salary wasn't enough to keep pace with the double-digit percentage increase in the annual cost of health-care premiums.

Nowadays, the joke is an insulting triple whammy. Not only are many private employees facing wage freezes or furloughs — if they have not been laid off — but their health care premiums continue to increase. Meanwhile, these employees' taxes continue to pay for some salary increases and free or heavily subsidized health care for many government workers.

For the first time, this year about 27,500 high-level state employees and elected officials will pay health insurance premiums. They'll have to make a major sacrifice: \$100 for single employees and \$360 for families. Per year!

About 2,500 of these folks, including Gov. Charlie Crist, earn more than \$100,000.

Until this year, according to a Miami Herald/St. Petersburg Times report, the 100,000 or so state employees who did pay health insurance premiums contributed only \$600 and \$2,160 a year for single and family coverage respectively. That's compared with the average contribution by all Florida workers of \$1,133 and \$4,697 a year, according to the liberal policy group Families USA.

And things don't get much better on the local level.

A 2009 study by the Kaiser Family Foundation, which focuses on health care issues, revealed that while the average American pays 17 percent and 27 percent of the health care premiums for single and family coverage, local and state employees pay only 10 percent and 21 percent of the cost.

In Indian River County, single employees get health care for free, but they pay 22 percent of the family cost, according to a recent Scripps Treasure Coast Newspapers study.

The average Treasure Coast county employee pays \$615 for single coverage and

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The average Treasure Coast county employee pays \$0 for single coverage and \$2,326 for family coverage.

Meantime, the pro-government-employee entitlement chorus features voices from two ends of the risers.

Sen. Mike Haridopolos, R-Indian River, the incoming Senate president, generally preaches tea party-like sermons on public spending. But when his own pocketbook is affected, he sounds different.

"It's not like we pay nothing. There are co-pays and deductibles," Haridopolos told the Herald and Times before lawmakers were forced to pay a small portion of their premiums. "It's not like Medicaid."

In an unusual twist of harmony, Haridopolos and Steve Myers, Teamsters Local No. 769 business agent, told newspapers that the lower premiums make up for lower legislative and public pay.

That may be so in Haridopolos' case, as lawmakers earn only \$31,000 a year. But this country's founders never envisioned the kind of salaries and perquisites, from health care to retirement, that today's professional lawmakers would receive.

As for Myers, he must have missed out on the 2009 study by the libertarian Cato Institute, which found U.S., state and local government workers earned an average of \$39.66 an hour in total compensation. Cato found public sector pay to be 34 percent higher and benefits 70 percent better than in the private sector.

Under massive pressure to cut budgets, local officials ought to face reality, as employees are their major expenses. Their first look must be balancing the budget by requiring employees to pay for a greater portion of their health care. Even if there are no merit raises or step increases this year.

It's time to get serious, and to have public employees share more fairly the burden of paying to keep themselves healthy.

Annual health care premiums of selected local government employees, average U.S. employee

Single Family

Indian River County: \$0 \$2,610

Vero Beach: \$0 \$4,382

Sebastian: \$0 \$6,888

Port St. Lucie bargaining unit: \$420 \$660

St. Lucie County PPO: \$480 \$1,260

Martin sheriff's Blue Choice: \$1,056 \$2,852

Average U.S. employee: \$920 \$3,611

Kaiser Family Foundation, local governments



Memorial Day on the Treasure Coast



Readers' Prom Photos 2010



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Weather

Currently 36-Hour Your Photos



Currently **85°**
Partly Cloudy
Wind: S 9mph

Today **87°**
72°

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Calendar

JUN 1 TUESDAY	JUN 2 WEDNESDAY	JUN 3 THURSDAY	BROWSE MORE
Treasure Coast United Soccer Club Registration 5 p.m. Halpatokee Regional Park			
Kali Natha Yoga 6 p.m. Kashi School of Yoga 11155 Roseland Road, Sebastian			
Qi-Gong 7 p.m. Kashi School of Yoga 11155 Roseland Road, Sebastian			
WORSHIP ALIVE! - Free Concert! 7 p.m. The Grace Place Community Church, 1550 S.E. Salerno Road Stuart			
Bluegrass, country and gospel music 7:30 p.m. Vero Beach Heritage Center			
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May 28, 2010
3:37 p.m.

WTA writes:

Wow,PSL workers pay less in a year than I pay in a month for family coverage.I am just as capable of bankrupting this city and bleeding the taxpayers dry as they are.Where do I sign up?

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May 28, 2010
5:57 p.m.

isabo_blue#207744 writes:

They should pay more for health coverage!

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May 28, 2010
6:10 p.m.

Cynical_Yet_Compassionate writes:

NOW YOU CAN SEE EXACTLY WHY I SAY....CUT....CUT....CUT....AND CUT MORE IF NEEDED....THERE IS PLENTY OF "FREELoading" GOING ON WITHIN THE PUBLIC EMPLOY CONCERNING BENEFITS RETIREMENT (DROP) AND HEALTH BEING THE MOST ABUSIVE.

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May 28, 2010
6:25 p.m.

earlyout writes:

Great story, I posted this article before..Good thing we're not in Trenton, NJ. FF's and Police pay nothing, and don't want to contribute..

<http://www.tcpalm.com/news/2010/may/2...>

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May 28, 2010
6:35 p.m.

Prospero writes:

Excessive health care benefits, excessive pension costs and excessive salaries are ALL a result of POOR NEGOTIATIONS at the table(GIVEAWAYS) and need to be cut NOW @\$%^&*()_ "Drinking" freely at the "Public Watering Hole" and at the expense of Taxpayer's needs to STOP NOW and excessive staffing levels need to be reduced too !!!!!!!!!!! The PJ needs to look closely at existing labor contracts (that's ALL contracts) with an eye toward excessive salary and benefits IN THE CITY OF VERO AND IN THE COUNTY. Don't worry though , they will not want to make ANY "waves" for the powers that be in this an election year @\$%^&*()_ TOO BAD #

[Suggest removal](#)[Reply to this post](#)

May 28, 2010
8:59 p.m.

hookedup writes:

Don't complain about it, go get a government job. Nobody made you work for yourself, wal-mart, publix or anywhere else. I see people driving to private sector jobs every day, not once have I seen someone drive by with a gun pointed at them making them go to work with no (or too expensive) benefits.

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May 29, 2010
10:22 a.m.

barty writes:

"" I seen someone drive by with a gun pointed at them making them go to work

""

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the unions have driven their greed to levels of unsupportable dimensions..just look at california and NJ or Pa. etc..AFSCME HAS BEEN A FINANCIAL DISASTER FOR GOVS.. the total bill yet to hit the table..the gov. negotiators were at the point of a gun.. now they need to stop these demands at all cost.. so let them strike and of course tell us that teachers and fire police will be first fired.. so FIRE THEM..

May 29, 2010
1:52 p.m.

notsofair writes:

I am so sick of these editorial diatribes that contain partial information and partial misinformation.

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1)Lumping all public employees together is NOT adequate when discussing these matters. Mr Myers represents the blue collar and clerical employees who's average annual salary is less than 35,000 dollars. These people are paying between 7 and 27 PERCENT of their take home pay towards single or family coverage plus increasing copays, and other restrictions.

2)If people know history at all they know it was labor unions who first offered insurance to it's members, because the group rates helped the low wage workers, somehow along the way these administrators and other greedy leaders decided that THEY want this too . So they gave themselves a new benefit, never having to negotiate with anyone just gimme, gimme, gimme, they get the high pay, the extra retirement funds, the shorter hours, the longer vacations and pay the same amount for health insurance as the working stiff who has to negotiated insurance, benefits and pay together through the collective bargaining agent (to whom they pay dues).

3)Just because these folks are in charge doesn't mean the public has to give them everthing and then take it out on the lowest paid workers.

Please consider these facts next time you want to berate government employees , and focus on the real villans, the ones who make the rules and benefit from them beyond what is reasonable. The working poor are the very best value in loal governments, they do it cheaper and better than ANY outsourced company.

May 29, 2010
6:59 p.m.

Vanzettio writes:

I couldn't agree more Notsofair. It is embaessing to know how little these Teachers,bus drivers, parks workers and ditch diggers earn.

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Much of this is scapegoating the working poor in the public sector.

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