

Letter to the Editor

## **County Employees not a source of revenue**

**Submitted by George "Jody" Sweeney  
Candidate for 5<sup>th</sup> District Levy Court**

A Kent County Levy Court Commissioner is considering making County employees pay more for their pensions and County retirees to pay more for health care. Mr. WG Edmanson, Commissioner from the 5<sup>th</sup> District, states that the savings will "preclude us from raising taxes in the future". Anytime a legislator says they are going to avoid raising taxes, it is misleading. Residents will not see a single cent in tax reductions by forcing County employees and retirees to increase their contributions.

The pension contribution is said to save about \$130,000 this year. The pension fund is not in dire straits. If it was, I am sure that the County employees would gladly contribute to the pension, voluntarily, and without complaint. If it comes to that, though, it will take working with them, together, as a team, to implement changes. No one benefits when blunt force is used.

The proposed change to retirees' healthcare contribution is of more concern to me. The County employees enjoy a wonderful benefit in that, at retirement, healthcare is covered 100%. This employment benefit is one of the reasons the County is able to attract such quality workers. The proposed ordinance changes the County contribution for healthcare for current and future retirees from 100% to something less, depending on their years of service. This is a benefit that many of us wish our employers would provide and I am envious of County employees, but I do not fault them for getting this benefit.

I would not propose to take it away from existing employees or retirees. For the most part, retirees of government service do not live out their lives in luxury. In many cases, they exist from paycheck to paycheck, working part time jobs (insert Wal-Mart greeter joke here), and cannot afford to pay the healthcare fees that the ordinance proposes. To force retirees to pay a portion of their income to healthcare would put many in financial dire straits. It is an unexpected expense that many will not be able to afford, forcing them to drop their County healthcare, and assume their place on Medicare. As an American taxpayer, I am paying for their healthcare, one way or another.

As a State employee, I am disappointed that I may not be receiving a raise this year. I know that there are many residents who think that State employees are overpaid for what they do, but there have been many 1-2% raises in the past that were accompanied by an increase in my contribution to healthcare, pension, or life insurance, leaving a net increase of zero dollars, or even a loss. But, I understand the current dire straits that the State is in, and accept the consequences. I did not choose State employment to make millions of dollars; I chose State employment for the balance of work and family life that I enjoy. County employees are much like State employees in that respect. They are not paid high salaries and many have families where both parents must work to get by. Having to pay a percentage of their income to their pension is just deflecting collecting a few pennies from all residents to collecting dollars from a few residents.

I have used the words "dire straits" here a couple of times. The county, its healthcare coverage, and the pension are not in dire straits. If that condition ever exists, Commissioners should do everything they can to avoid raising taxes, but not by taking money out of employees' pockets.