

We are consistently hearing from those political leaders who are resisting what many of us consider to be the adequate funding of education that Schools are receiving more state support than ever and that support is increasing every year. Typically they say that people need to know the facts. Well, that is part of the story and although not a false statement it is certainly deceptive. I will make an attempt to explain the part of the story that they are not telling.

Deception #1 - Special Education Services in many cases are provided by Cooperatives or Interlocals. Schools contract with these groups to provide quality services collectively that would be very difficult to provide individually. This is a very efficient way to provide those services. Until recently special education funds were sent directly to the Cooperative or Interlocal. However, a few years ago those funds were sent to the local public school and the school then sent those funds to the provider of services. This was lauded as an increase in public school funding when; in fact, it was the same amount but just laundered through the public schools. It did increase the budget of the public school but provided no additional funds to that district.

Deception #2 - Until recently the state contribution to the Kansas Public Employees Retirement System (KPERS) was sent directly to KPERS. Now the funds are transferred to the public school account and then transferred to KPERS on the same day. Again, this was lauded as an increase to public school funding even though it was the same amount of money with just an additional transfer from the State of Kansas to the school to KPERS.

Deception #3 - Until this year when we paid our property taxes to our counties the county sent the schools portion of those taxes to the proper school district. Now those funds are sent to the State and the state then sends those funds to the school. This looks like a tremendous increase in state funding for schools when, in fact, it is just a redistribution of funds from local to state.

These three deceptions amount to hundreds of millions of dollars that are being advertised as increases in school funding when they are only reclassifications of funds that were already being spent.

Some of our political leaders are proud of the fact that a benefit of the block grant is the schools will receive the same amount as they have in the past. However, because of inconsistent support for the past several years many schools are having to use fund balances to meet current needs. Those schools that do not have fund balances have to make cuts in services to kids to survive. Spending fund balances is like an individual using their savings account on their monthly expenses. Pretty soon the savings account is empty and the obligations continue. School districts are criticized for having fund balances but of the uncertainty of state support, which has become an increasing problem over the past few years, having those fund balances has become necessary for survival.

Keeping funding level sounds to some like a positive step, however, even though revenue may be level, expenses are not. Areas of increased expenses where schools have no option include: Increased cost of insurance (property and casualty, health, etc.), supplies, utilities, increase in number of students, increase and severity of students with special needs among many others. If revenue remains level and costs increase the only option is to reduce services to children. Many schools have already reduced the school year, summer school, activities, elective options, field trips and other enrichment activities along with increasing class sizes among other things, and without additional support these reductions will continue to the detriment to the school children of Kansas.

Another deceptive statement is that Kansas has thousands of new businesses. With the current tax structure allowing many businesses to avoid Kansas Income tax completely I would like to propose an alternative theory. Thousands of Kansas businesses have changed their status so that they qualify under the tax plan and do not have to pay taxes. Those existing Kansas businesses are listed as new businesses even though they have just changed their status. The prediction was that there would be about 190,000 businesses in Kansas

who would qualify for the income tax exemption; however, the real number is more like 330,000.

To make up the difference the tax burden is being placed on the property owner and the consumer. Sales taxes have increased. Sales tax is the most regressive tax available as the lower the income the larger percentage of income goes to pay the sales tax. Political subdivisions like cities, counties, school districts, etc. are having to respond in two ways. One is to continue to reduce valuable services and the other is to raise the mill levy. When you receive your tax statement and find that it has increased, that increase is made necessary because 330,000 businesses are getting a pass on the backs of property owners and consumers.

I would urge those political leaders who are bragging about the fact that the "Sun is shining in Kansas" to stop deceptive language and tell the whole story. There are many great things about living in Kansas but our citizens deserve to know the whole story.