



Questioning teachers' union membership

Jim Waters

One reason membership in private sector labor unions has dropped dramatically in recent decades is that constituents began questioning whether losing a chunk of change out of their paychecks in the form of dues was actually bringing a reasonable return on investment.

Teachers are also asking questions about their union membership, as well.

Here's one: If teachers' unions are doing such a great job of representing the profession, why are fewer people choosing it for a career and why are more educators leaving the field altogether?

U.S. Census data indicate that education held the highest share of majors among college students in 1975. By 2015, fewer than one in 10 Americans pursuing a degree were majoring in education.

A May 2017 study by researchers at the University of California at Los Angeles reports fewer than 5 percent of college freshmen plan to major in education – less than half the number with intentions of entering the classroom in the 1970s.

Union bosses and their enablers are in knee-jerk mode about these declines, claiming that stagnant pay and pension reforms are primary culprits contributing to teachers abandoning the classroom or college students choosing other areas of study.

Yet even the National Education Association, the nation's largest teachers' union, admits most teachers aren't headed to the poor house; their own data shows the average teacher in America makes \$58,353.

And, an official report on average classroom teacher salaries in Kentucky shows teachers statewide made \$53,450 in the 2017-18 school year.

Factor in low cost of living and overly generous benefits, and the evidence just isn't there to support claims by ideological union bosses and lazy reporters that Kentucky teachers leave the classroom because they're not paid enough.

It's not just that young people aren't as attracted to teaching as to other professions many of them consider more exciting and rewarding – like computer science or fine arts – but we're seeing teachers leave after being in the classroom for a long time.

Around 8 percent of American teachers left the profession during the past decade – nearly double the attrition rates in nations like Finland and Singapore, a decline that even the left-leaning Learning Policy Institute acknowledged was due, at least in part, to a lack of resources and support for teaching in high-poverty schools that usually have high minority student populations.

Which leads to another question regarding union membership, especially for teachers paying dues to the Jefferson County Teachers Association (JCTA): If even the Learning Policy Institute recognizes how “teachers with little preparation tend to leave at rates two to three times as high as those who have had a comprehensive preparation,” why does JCTA continue to oppose allowing the district to require experienced teachers to serve in the most troubled and lowest-performing schools when needed?

Plus, why does the JCTA continue to oppose offering these teachers meaningful financial incentives to make such moves?

Currently, in large urban districts like Jefferson County, where collective-bargaining agreements

take precedence over the needs of students, schools and even teachers, the most recent and inexperienced graduates often are placed in the toughest environments. This creates challenges many new teachers simply aren't prepared to handle.

Meanwhile, a tenured teacher enjoys a comfy spot in a wealthy suburban school and can say “no” to a transfer while pointing to their union representative when the superintendent comes calling.

Which leads to personal questions Kentucky's teachers might consider regarding union membership: “Why should I continue giving up my hard-earned money paying dues to an organization that gives lip service to representing poor and minority students then leads the charge against policies that would benefit those same student groups? Is that what I want to be associated with?”

Jim Waters is president and CEO of the Bluegrass Institute for Public Policy Solutions, Kentucky's free-market think tank. Read previous columns at www.bipps.org. He can be reached at jwaters@freedomkentucky.com and @bipps on Twitter.

Extra Help With Medicare Prescription Drug Costs



David K. Smith
Social Security District Manager, Bowling Green KY

Paying out of pocket for prescription drugs can be a burden that many households can't afford. The Extra Help with Medicare Prescription Drug Plan Costs program was designed to help people in getting the vital medicine they need to live healthy and productive lives.

Anyone who has Medicare can get Medicare prescription drug coverage. Some people with limited resources and income may also be able to get Extra Help to pay for the costs – monthly premiums, annual deductibles, and prescription co-payments – related to a Medicare prescription drug plan. Extra Help can be worth up to \$4,900 per year.

To qualify for Extra Help in 2019, your resources must be limited to \$14,390 for an individual or \$28,720 for a married couple living together.

You can apply for Extra Help at www.socialsecurity.gov/extrahelp. You can also call Social

Security at 1-800-772-1213 (TTY 1-800-325-0778) to apply over the phone or request an application, or if you prefer, you can apply at your local Social Security office.

To prepare for your application you should:

- Identify the things you own alone, with your spouse, or with someone else, but do not include your home, vehicles, burial plots, life insurance policies, or personal possessions;

- Review all your income; and

- Gather your records in advance to save time.

The records you'll need are:

- Statements that show your account balances at banks, credit unions, or other financial institutions;

- Investment statements;

- Stock certificates;

- Tax returns;

- Pension award letters; and

- Payroll slips.

The program was created because there is a great need for prescription drug assistance. Social Security is here to help.

To learn more about the Extra Help program, visit www.socialsecurity.gov/extrahelp.



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