

THOMPSON EDITORIAL: State workers shouldn't bear all of burden

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Teamsters Local 117 Secretary-Treasurer, Tracey A. Thompson, speaks out in defense of public-sector employees in the following editorial published on March 3 in the Tacoma News Tribune. [To read and comment on the article at the TNT website, click here.](#)

State workers shouldn't bear all of the burden

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Our elected officials propose to balance the state budget on the backs of state employees even though state employees did not cause this budget deficit and are already underpaid, underappreciated and overworked.

Public perception of state employment, fueled by a media that generally degrades state employees, is very different from the reality. For example, did you know the state only pays its employees 75 percent of the wages received by people performing comparable work in our local municipalities and private industry?

It's true. Every few years the state hires a consultant to survey local cities, counties and private industry on what they pay their employees for similar work. Rather than pay its employees 100 percent of the average, the state pays its employees 25 percent less than the average. This means that a correctional officer employed in your city or county likely earns 25 percent more than a correctional officer working at the Washington State Penitentiary.

Did you know that state employees did not receive cost-of-living increases in 2009 or 2010?

It's true. State employees do not get cost-of-living increases, while most other public employees do. State workers, who already are paid 25 percent less than their neighbors, have not and will not see any wage increase even though the cost of living is increasing.

Did you know that state employees pay 12 percent of their health insurance premiums in addition to significant co-pays and deductibles?

It's true. Even though state employees are paid 25 percent less than their counterparts and will not have seen a wage increase for years, they continue to pay 12 percent toward their health insurance premiums. Under the governor's proposed budget those premiums will climb.

Did you know that on Jan. 1, state employees were required to pay an additional \$117 million in increased point-of-services costs?

So, state workers, who are paid 25 percent less than the average and who have not had wage increases, despite an increase in the cost of living, and who are paying 12 percent of the health insurance premiums, are now paying \$117 million more than last year for their health care.

As if that isn't enough, did you know that the Legislature wants to take an additional 4.2 percent

away from state employees in the form of wage reductions or unpaid furloughs?

It's true. Both the House and the Senate want to reduce state employee compensation even further by imposing wage reductions and/or up to 11 unpaid furlough days.

Balance is not achieved by taking away from those who already have given. It is unjust, indecent and immoral to require state employees to bear more of the burden of the budget deficit. That burden needs to be borne by all of us.