

New state employee pay plan approved

The Legislature has finally taken steps to bring state employees to market. While the chair of the House Pay Plan Committee and I tried to get the plan and its funding passed early in the session, we ran into some problems with delayed action from the Senate. We finally got the plan passed and funded during the early part of the veto session and breathed a sigh of relief! This new plan was strongly endorsed by our K-State Classified Senate and their testimony during hearings was an important part of its support and passage.

This year, five new classified state employee pay plans were approved for implementation, along with a new statewide employee performance management system, a 2.5 percent base salary adjustment for all state employees and a market salary adjustment system through regular surveys. This legislation resulted from over a year of work with a bipartisan group of which I was the ranking minority member of the committee. Working cooperatively with Pay Committee Chair Pat George, R-Dodge City, and advice from minority leader Dennis McKinney, D-Greensburg, we were able to find a compromise with the State Employee Group and keep the longevity pay provision in the plan for existing state employees. I believe this plan (especially with the five year commitment to the market funding), is a strong statement of support to our state employees.

Currently, Kansas classified state employees work under a system based on longevity and position

(step and grade). The new plan will gradually transition to a "compensation philosophy." Similar to the private sector, this philosophy offers competitive compensation based on relevant labor markets and employee performance. Supporters believe this will help raise expectations for both managers and employees, aiding in the retention and recruitment of our great state workers.

The five basic pay plans for classified employees include: Basic Vocational Pay, General Classified Pay, Management Pay, Professional Individual Contributor Pay and Protective Services Pay. House Bill 2916 phases out longevity bonuses for all new state employees hired after June 15, 2008, but maintains it for current employees.

Kansas employs thousands of classified workers, very few who currently work at market value. The main goal of the proposal is to bring state employees' salary into the competitive range of those paid to workers with similar experience and education in the private sector, as well as other public sector agencies like cities and counties.

A weighted, multi-year plan must be implemented to make the appropriate cost of living adjustments and bring classified employees to market value.

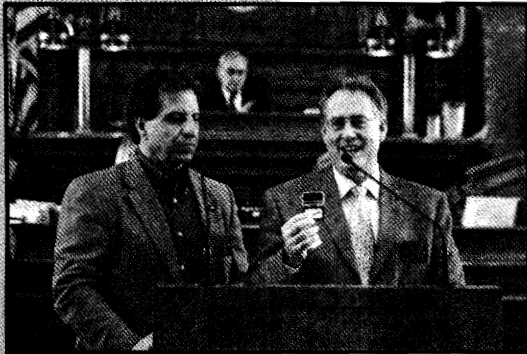
The pay plan is a progressive attempt to make a five-year commitment to funding a market survey and adjustment approach, with a new evaluation system that allows for some pay for performance processes. It a bold initiative and I believe it is in the best interest of Kansas' state employees and our state taxpayers.

Kansas stalking law strengthened

The Legislature made important changes to Kansas' stalking law this year that will enable law enforcement to better protect local communities. Previously, law enforcement faced difficulty in effectively responding to stalking complaints because statutory definitions allowed for varied interpretation of what is considered a "credible threat." As a result, complaints were too difficult to prove in court.

The new law (also referred to as "Jodi's Law") clarifies the definition of "credible threat." It now includes intentional, reckless engagement in conduct that causes a reasonable person to fear for their safety or for the safety of their family. It also includes tougher penalties for stalking. A first-time conviction is a Class A misdemeanor, with second and third convictions as felonies with increasing levels of severity.

The legislation developed in response to the rape and murder of Jodi Sanderholm, a 19-year-old girl whose killer stalked her for years prior to her death. Law enforcement could not adequately protect Sanderholm because according to statute the murderer broke no law until he kidnapped her. Jodi's Law will help prevent brutal murders and crimes such as this from happening again.



Rep. Hawk (right) debates a bill on the House floor.