

Republican Caucus Public Hearing on State Revenue, May 11, 2015

My name is Brian Anderson. I am a legislative representative for Council 4 AFSCME, a union of 32,000 public and private employees. Thank you for having this public hearing today. Council 4 supports Senate Bill 942, the Democratic General Assembly caucuses' bill on revenue. Intertwined is the Appropriations Committee spending bill. We support that too.

The most important thing that SB 942 does is restore some tax on Connecticut's richest residents. It raises the income tax level on the highest earners from 6.7 to 6.99%. It reinstates a 2% tax on capital gains which would start at a high level of income.

This stands in stark contrast to the Republican General Assembly caucus budget proposal. Make no mistake, that proposal also contains a tax – a special tax on middle and lower income state employees. Over the last decade, state employees have made concessions in wages, pension and health care to the state amounting to billions of dollars. These savings to taxpayers have helped close budget deficits and protect state services.

At a time when the American middle class is rapidly shrinking, this is the wrong direction to go in. Unfortunately I hear many attacks from Republican legislators on Connecticut public employees. These attacks say that these rank and file state employees are overpaid. But I never hear any specifics.

So I ask. Who are our overpaid members? Is it the Correction employees? Correction employees put their lives on the line every day, keeping the rest of us safe. They have one of the highest mortality rates of any profession (a recent Fla union study shows that they die at 63 years of age where rest of public dies at 75 years of age). Is it the DCF social workers? They enter abusive homes to remove at risk children every day. God forbid that a child on their heavy caseloads dies, because aside from the emotional trauma and guilt, their careers are destroyed. Is it the DOT employees? Three of them were seriously injured while maintaining state highways just two weekends ago.

Please feel free to examine any state employee contracts or come for a tour of any of our worksites. Please come speak to our members ask them about what they do for a living or what they get paid. But please stop the attacks on the pay, pension and health care of middle class state and municipal employees. The standard of living for these employees has not gone up in over twenty years. Their pay increases have barely covered inflation.

This is in contrast to the massive wealth gains of the one percent of our richest citizens. Since 1979, the U.S. gross domestic product has risen by 150%. Worker productivity rose by 75%. Yet wages only rose by 5%. The lion's share of that wealth gain has gone to a very small percentage of the richest. It is time to ask the rich to pay their fair share for the good of our state. Thank you for listening.