

Senate Leader Phil Berger Lays Out Chamber's Plan For Teachers

By Administrator

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RALEIGH, (SGRToday.com) - As legislators and Gov. Pat McCrory continue to hammer out a new plan for K-12 education for the new fiscal year that begins July 1, the head of the North Carolina Senate laid out his chamber's plan for compensating teachers in a column published at blueridgenow.com.

Senate Leader Phil Berger's column is below. It can be found at <http://www.blueridgenow.com/article/20140624/ARTICLES/406241000?p=all&tc=pgall>

Not too long ago, North Carolina was a state that was falling short, no matter how you measured it.

After decades of failed tax-and-spend policies, we were losing jobs. With the fourth highest unemployment rate in the country and the highest tax burden in the Southeast, there's no question we were struggling to compete.

But since assuming leadership of the General Assembly in 2011, Republicans have worked tirelessly to put our state back on track. In that short time, we've closed a massive budget deficit, reined in wasteful spending and given hardworking families the largest tax cut in state history.

Now, as a result, North Carolina is measuring up well on a slew of national yardsticks. We've advanced from 44th to 17th place in the Tax Foundation's State Business Tax Climate Index, jumping ahead of nearly all our southeastern neighbors.

And more people are going to work in North Carolina than ever before. Our unemployment rate is more than 4 percent lower than it was in 2011. In March, our state trailed only Florida in the number of new jobs created. And in April, our unemployment rate was the second most improved in the nation from a year ago.

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While we've made tremendous progress, one place we have historically lagged behind — and still do — is in compensating our teachers. There's no greater investment we can make than in preparing our kids for the future, and there's no question teachers make the most significant impact on student performance within the classroom.

But due to a deep recession and an archaic pay scale, North Carolina has ranked near the bottom in teacher pay. It's an embarrassment that Senate Republicans are committed to fixing.

Fortunately, the same responsible budgeting decisions and pro-growth policies that have helped turn our economy around will help us change this troubling statistic — and soon.

The Senate recently passed a groundbreaking plan to offer the largest teacher pay raise in state history — an average 11 percent permanent raise. It would reform the outdated 37-step pay scale with an entirely new system and offer more than a \$5,800 average salary increase per teacher in the first year of implementation alone.

Building on feedback from educators, the Senate proposal would repeal the law that automatically eliminates tenure in 2018 and instead offer teachers a choice. Teachers who decide to work on annual contracts would move to the new pay scale and receive the substantial salary increase.

Those who decide they value tenure more would remain on the current pay schedule.

Now, some liberal special interests and columnists demagogue and diminish the opportunity for teachers to receive a generous 11 percent raise in exchange for signing an annual contract. But bear in mind that most North Carolinians — save for a few rare cases like professional athletes, celebrities and CEOs — work “at will” with no problem.

That's why one Charlotte-area science teacher told The Associated Press that she was ready

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to forgo tenure after 13 years in the classroom. She said most jobs don't have tenure protections — and good teachers don't need them.

“If you do your job and you don't get into trouble like with the law or anything like that, you don't have to worry about having tenure to back you up because you're not going to get fired,” she said.

It's common sense, and so is making a \$468 million investment in teachers to boost us from 47th in overall teacher pay to 27th nationally — and from ninth to third in the Southeast, ahead of Virginia, Tennessee and South Carolina.

It is time for the legislature to act together to invest nearly half a billion dollars in teacher pay raises. Making North Carolina a regional leader will give our Commerce Department one more tool for job recruitment and encourage the best and brightest educators to make a long-term commitment to their profession, our students and our state.