

Remarks of the Honorable S. Chris Jones
Re: State Employee and Trooper Pay Raises
January 25, 2017

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House, this morning I was proud to stand with Senator Norment and Hanger and announce that we have reached agreement on a salary increase for state employees and state police.

Mr. Speaker, for too many years we have treated our state employees as an afterthought in the budget process. Last year however, the General Assembly took the lead and provided for a 3% salary increase to our state employees and provided the second installment of the new state police pay plan. Unfortunately, these salary actions were contingent on meeting our Fiscal Year 2016 revenue projections. When that failed to happen, state employees lost their pay raise.

In fact the entire compensation package for all employee groups was contingent on meeting the revenue forecast. Despite the fact that the state's share of funding would not be released to school divisions and our colleges and universities, this did not hamper their efforts to provide pay raises. In the case of school divisions all but 12 provided a salary action. This is not a criticism, because pay raises are determined by the local school boards, not the General Assembly. In fact, we will pay our share of that cost when we re-benchmark the cost of public education, which we do every two years.

Likewise the Board of Visitors at our colleges and universities have the authority to grant pay raises to their faculty, which again many of them did.

Unfortunately state agencies do not have the same authority to grant a general salary increase to state workers. This authority resides solely with the General Assembly.

Throughout this process I and the Members of the Appropriations Committee were mindful of the women and men who serve the Commonwealth as highway workers who build and maintain our roads; as correctional officers and state troopers that protect us; and, the nurses and direct care attendants that provide care and services to those most in need. These are the faces of government who, unlike the policy makers, actually have to implement programs and do them in a cost effective and efficient manner.

The Governor's introduced budget, HB 1500, failed to provide an actual pay raise for our state employees. Mr. Speaker, budgets are about making choices and setting priorities.

For the last two weeks we have re-examined not only the Governor's proposed new spending in HB 1500, but we have looked at all discretionary spending decisions made last Session.

Our task was to make state workers and state troopers a priority in our budget amendments.

Mr. Speaker, your workforce Commission urged the General Assembly to restore that lost pay raise to state employees and state police. The budget that will be adopted by the Committee on February 5th will uphold that recommendation, by restoring the 3% pay raise effective July 2017. In addition, we will allocate \$10.5 million to take the starting salary of a state trooper to \$43,000.

Mr. Speaker, we continue to work with our friends in the Senate to address salary compression for our Deputy Sheriffs and an across the

board salary increase for our state-supported local employees. You will see something on this in our budget as well.

Finally Mr. Speaker, I again applaud our school boards for meeting the needs of their teachers. My pledge on behalf of the Committee is to redirect more funding to our school divisions in a manner that 1) gives them total discretion; and, 2) does not require our local governments to match that support.

Last year this House re-established the policy of sending back a portion of the Lottery proceeds to our school divisions on a per-pupil basis without strings attached to those dollars. At that time I stated that the goal was to get back to the 40% of proceeds being distributed in this manner. The budget adopted last Session distributed approximately 30% of the Lottery proceeds in FY 18.

Knowing what our goal is Mr. Speaker, we are working hard to identify the resources to hopefully achieve the 40%. If we achieve this goal, the schools get much needed flexibility in allocating dollars where they think it is best served, be it a pay raise for their teachers or funding their share of getting to 100% of the required VRS contribution rate.

The added benefit to this method of school funding is that local governments do not have to match it in order to receive it, which amounts to providing our citizens with tax relief at the local level.