

Opinion: Retirees deserve more from KPERS

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There is a forgotten group in Kansas. Approximately 50 retired educators who have taught 30 years or more with a minimum of a baccalaureate degree and have met all state requirements for retirement receive under \$500 per month from the Kansas Public Employees Retirement System (KPERS). One of this group lives in Garden City and with her permission some information relating to her chosen profession will be shared.

Ninety-seven-year-old Florence Wilson taught her first year in 1940 at a contracted salary of \$520 per year. Her first year of teaching was in a one-room school. She paid \$20 per month for room and board. She walked two miles to reach the school in time to empty heating stove ashes from the previous day and then start a fire to warm the building before the students arrived.

Besides teaching grades one through eight, other responsibilities included pumping water for drinking and washing hands before lunch, posting and removing the flag, cleaning the chalk boards and erasers, sweeping the floor, bringing in cobs and coal for the next morning, and collecting papers to grade that evening in light provided by a kerosene lantern after the two-mile walk to her living quarters.

Before the computer age, each five years, the forgotten group of educators had to move to a university campus to meet certification requirements. This required them to keep their "local" home intact and rent living space in the university city for the eight-week term.

Florence retired in 1979 after having taught 30 years. Most of which were in Garden City, with a final year annual salary of \$13,444.35.

It is common knowledge that the cost of living has continued to rise, which makes it very difficult for the forgotten group to survive. We know that Kansas is broke, but we seem to find funds for other cost of living increases. In 1987, Kansas legislators approved a 13th \$300 check per year for teachers with 10 or more years experience who retired prior to that date. That increase provided Florence Wilson with an average retirement income of slightly over \$300 per month.

Prior to 1998, the Kansas legislators provided retired educators with an occasional cost of living increase. Since 1998, no cost of living increase has been provided. That was the year when a first class postage stamp cost 32 cents and gas was considered high at \$1.11 per gallon.

Is it possible the forgotten group is being penalized for a Supreme Court decision?

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