

# Notes from the State Employee Power Series Kickoff on January 29th



We were delighted to be with a full room of state employees from many agencies at our gathering on Jan. 29th in the Labor Temple! We had a good discussion. We talked about the importance of unions: even after Act 10 in Wisconsin, we can engage in [concerted activity](#), and we can obtain key information through open records requests.

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How can we move the decision makers who can give us a significant raise? We briefly considered some examples of public employees who struggled to move decision makers recently -- and won.

1. The UW TAA (grad student workers) got a 9% raise in Feb. 2019, using actions like petitions, public advocacy, sit-ins, and demonstrations.
2. The TSA Agents staged a sick-out in early 2019 that played a very big role in ending the federal government shutdown.
3. The West Virginia state employees enjoyed a 5% pay raise in 2018 and another 5% raise in 2019, after getting "included" in the settlement by teachers.



## Compensation

It's very simple really.

We are all getting across-the-board raises but they haven't kept up with inflation for more than a decade. We can't count on "market money," parity pay or bonuses to fix this problem, because more than 8 out of 10 of us do not get them.

We've lost purchasing power since 2009.

- State employees [lost over 20%](#) of our purchasing power from mid-2009 to 2017, and we've continued to lose since then as raises have not kept up with inflation.
- We are 4.5% below the national average for similar public employees according to a 2018 [analysis](#) by the Wisconsin Budget Project.

## Compensation Plan

We discussed the Compensation Plan, both the new (current) one, and the timeline for getting something better in the next biennial budget.

Our current [Comp Plan](#) was passed by the Joint Committee on Employment Relations (JCOER) on Dec. 18, 2019.

Historically, most state employees had pay set through union contracts, not the Compensation Plan, but this changed in the Walker Administration with Act 10. So now the Comp Plan is a large document determining amounts and rules for compensating about 30,000 employees statewide! JCOER has tended to pass the Comp Plan with little fanfare in the past, but this year they wielded a mighty red pen and struck out many worker-friendly provisions prior to their approval.

Left on the cutting room floor was the \$15 minimum wage, and many other market adjustments and other pay improvements.

Virtually all permanent employees of state agencies will get the 2% and 2% general wage adjustment (GWA) outlined in the State Budget.

Consider the median wage for a state employees that is about \$25 an hour (\$52,000 a year). With the raise, the worker will come out about \$2,000 further ahead after two years.

That is the end of the story for most of us. Only one or two workers out of ten get any bonus, market increase, pay progression, add-on pay or similar. Most of us get the 2% and 2% and that's it for a raise.

However, we cheer for those who get raises above that. That would have included 5,800 state employees (of 30,614). However, JCOER cut 1,000 people from the 5,800, according to DOA HR Chief Malika Evanco, as stated in her testimony (see video of JCOER hearing [here](#)).

It was particularly galling to lose out on the \$15 minimum wage package. An [estimated](#) 410 permanent employees earn under \$15 an hour now, but the package also included "decompression" adjustments for those making just at or above \$15 so there would have been spread in pay maintained. To see a chart of state employee hourly wage rates from a few years back, see Chart 13 [here](#).

[Media reports](#) say the total dollar amount of the raise was [\\$84.2 million](#).

Have a question about a specific part of the proposed Comp Plan? The Leg. Fiscal Bureau has this ["summary"](#) where you can dig in.



## JCOER's Red Pen

JCOER was unusually activist in editing the proposed Comp Plan

this time. They cut the \$15 minimum wage package. Some of the job groups with proposed raises cut included: entry level IS (information systems) job classes, DMV customer service, Dept. of Revenue agents & economists, building inspectors, public utility auditors and analysts, and DNR job classes.

The proposed commuter bus pass pilot was eliminated, the higher hotel reimbursement rates proposed were axed, and there were other cuts.

The original [Cost Estimate](#) for the Comp Plan proposed by DOA in November gives a short summary with dollar figures. On the last page (p. 5), under B, the only items left standing by JCOER were:

Line 1 Certified Nursing Assistants (CNA) add-on  
Line 10-12 Law enforcement dispatcher, Nurse Clinician, DOJ forensic scientist

Under C, the first two lines were deleted by JCOER, and the rest was approved.

There are still a number of raises beyond the 2% and 2% that still stand, even after JCOER's cutting spree. Raises for institutional workers in Dept. of Health Services and Dept. of Corrections, as well as nurses and CNAs appeared to be approved. Tap into the final Comp Plan [here](#) to see the full list.

## Cuts in Health Insurance



Other cuts in our pay come through the creeping increase in healthcare premiums, co-pays and deductibles. It's not as visible as wages. But it's a pay cut just the same.

The cuts through health insurance continue! Currently, state leaders expect to get \$15 million from state employees over two years, simply by inducing us to accept the High Deductible health insurance! See Table 2, Page 4 in this [summary](#).



# Are LTEs getting a raise at your agency?

Limited-term employees number about 5,200 in state agencies and they get very little in benefits, and are paid less than permanent employees doing the same work. Often they are actually long-term employees, not short-term. There are many injustices here, and permanent employees have a self-interest in stopping this exploitative practice by the employer.

The Comp Plan passed in December allows agencies to confer the GWA (2% and 2%) on their LTEs, but few seem to know this. The WI Historical Society has decided to do this. DNR got on board recently, and will give the 2% raise to LTEs starting in February. Are LTEs at your agency getting a raise?

**Thanks for coming out & see you next time!**

**State Employee Power Series #2**

**February 26th**

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