

State workers should pay more for health plans

The Kentucky Chamber of Commerce has a good suggestion when it says that state employees should be asked to pay more of their health insurance costs to help ease the strain on a state budget, which is facing very grim prospects.

The group says that state workers receive more generous benefits than most private employees and that state government costs for public employee health insurance soared by 174 percent in the past decade.

It doesn't seem unreasonable to expect some adjustments at a time taxpayers, as well as state government, have tightened their belts.

Chamber President Dave Adkisson had a very good point when he noted that requiring state workers to contribute \$50 a month more for health coverage would save the state \$94 million and would not cost employees the full amount because those contributions are exempt from taxes.

This proposal doesn't seem like too much to ask, although opposition is likely to be strong.

Adkisson believes these changes could generate nearly \$200 million in savings in the 2010-12 budget.

At a time when our state is struggling to stay afloat, why wouldn't the state consider an option that could generate these kinds of savings?

Spending for health insurance for state employees has increased dramatically in the past 10 years.

According to recent research by the Kentucky chamber, total general fund spending has increased by 33 percent since 2000. During the same period, the state's average monthly per employee contribution for health insurance has increased by more than 174 percent - from \$221 a month in 2000 to more than \$600 a month in 2010.

Adkisson called these trends "unsustainable."

A level playing field more on par with private employees is needed here and the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce's proposal merits serious consideration.