

*February 5, 2013 Press Conference, House Bill 142
KFTC Statement delivered by Becki Winchel*

Good morning. My name is Becki Winchel and I'm speaking for the Economic Justice Committee of Kentuckians For The Commonwealth.

KFTC is excited to be here to support a significant proposal that would help move Kentucky forward toward being a really Great State.

Rep. Wayne's proposal is a real solution that addresses critical needs of Kentuckians that have gone unmet for too long, and we're happy to support this bold plan to reform our taxes in a way that makes the system more fair and responds to our critical revenue needs. Thank you Rep. Wayne.

We are pleased with the increased attention to comprehensive tax reform that Governor Beshear provided last year with the appointment of the Blue Ribbon Commission, with some goals that KFTC members have long advocated – Fairness, Elasticity, and Adequacy.

And we applaud the work of the Commission and thank commissioners and their staff for the many hours spent tackling this tough issue. I attended several commission meetings, reviewed their report and know there is much good in the Commission's recommendations. We are glad to see that those have become the backbone of this legislation.

While Rep. Wayne's proposal is based on good fiscal policy, for KFTC members our support is based on a vision; a vision that Kentucky can become a great state, if we want that and are willing to make the investments necessary to bring that about.

It's very disturbing when I hear legislators say we don't need more revenue. Where have they been? In my work with the nonprofit community in Louisville, I've seen too many folks who are trampled, looked over or turned away. That's not the kind of people we are. That's not the kind of state we want to be. But those realities are a function of our inadequate budget.

Our state budget is one of the best means we have for moving Kentucky and its people forward. And I challenge those legislators who will dismiss this legislation to tell us what their vision is for making Kentucky a great state, or if they even aspire to that. If their vision includes leaving some people behind, then they don't share this goal.

Becki Winchel, KFTC
February 5, 2013

I also would like to address the Bluegrass Poll that was cited in The Courier Journal, finding that a majority of people think this is not a good time to raise taxes. If I were a legislator, I would take that personally, and be offended by it. Because I think people are saying they don't have confidence or desire to invest in a half-hearted effort to keep muddling along as best we can.

Suppose that poll had started at a different place. Suppose it had started by asking people what their hopes and dreams are for their kids or grandkids, if they'd like to have schools that were okay or schools that were the best in the country. If they'd like to live in a community where people who are having a rough go of it aren't trampled and looked over but are given the care and help they need to get back on their feet. And a community where the air is clean and the water is safe? Or maybe it would just be knowing that we are not constantly pulling ourselves out of a hole but moving forward and investing in our shared future.

KFTC's vice-chairperson Dana Beasley Brown asks the question, "What would it mean for our economic development if Kentucky had a reputation nationally as having the best-educated and most skilled workers?" Wouldn't that be exciting? Wouldn't that be something we'd all want to invest in? Wouldn't that be a place where you'd want to live and raise a family as well as locate your business?

For those of us who are tired of feeling ordinary Kentuckians aren't being listened to, the Blue Ribbon Commission public hearing process gave many of us a chance to share our vision. And Rep. Wayne this legislation shows you were a good listener.

Thank you again for believing we can move Kentucky forward.

Statement of Dana Beasley Brown
Vice-Chair, Kentuckians For The Commonwealth
On the Introduction of Tax Reform Legislation
February 5, 2013

Thank you Representative Wayne for inviting me and Kentuckians For The Commonwealth to speak this morning. And thank you for your leadership for making our tax system more fair and better able to serve the people of Kentucky.

My name is Dana Beasley Brown. I am a stay-at-home mom of 2 preschoolers and the wife of a youth pastor in Bowling Green.

I know we're here to talk about tax reform, but I'm here to talk about making Kentucky a Great State. Because that's what's at stake here.

I believe this is possible, and I'm asking our legislators to share a vision that Kentucky can be a really great state.

I am here for two reasons. The first is my children. It seems to me that there is a lot of talk about competitiveness. Talk about how we can win the race to be the cheapest labor in land. This is not the dream I have for my kids and their friends. I do not dream that employers will want to hire my kids because they come cheap. I dream that employers will want to hire my kids and their friends because they are the brightest, most skilled labor force in the world. Not in spite of being Kentuckians, but because they are Kentuckians.

What would it mean for our economic development if Kentucky had a reputation nationally as having the best-educated and most skilled workers?

The other reason I am here is because I grew up in poverty. I witnessed first hand economic injustices. These experiences put a fire in me to be a voice for working class families who get left out of these conversations and are treated unfairly because of it. But when many ordinary Kentuckians did get the chance to speak up – at Blue Ribbon Commission hearings last summer – time and time again we spoke for making our system more fair.

We all benefit from our paved roads, our parks, police and fire protection, our education system and most of us have someone in our life who benefits from the safety net that, for example, takes care of grandma and grandpa, or our cousin on disability or a sibling who has lost a job. Most of us could not pick up the slack if we didn't all pitch in together and pay our taxes.

I'm aware that a recent Bluegrass Poll showed that a majority of people don't support increasing taxes at this time. But suppose the question was based on a vision for Kentucky that people saw would make a difference in our everyday lives.

A question such as: Would you mind paying a little more a year to know that your elderly neighbor will not miss too many meals because we've eliminated the waiting list for Meals on Wheels?

Or: Would you mind paying a little bit more to know that people are not getting sick because our air is clean and our water safe to drink?

Or paying a little more to educate and empower our students so they become the brightest, most innovative and skilled work force in the world?

These are some of the things that go into making Kentucky a great state to live, raise a family and do business. I believe this is what Kentuckians want. I believe this is possible.

It starts with a tax system that shows our commitment to one another, that raises enough revenue to meet our essential needs and does so in a way that is fair to all.

When I hear legislators say we don't need new revenue, or we can let revenue grow as the economy grows, what I hear is that we are satisfied with the status quo, that we don't have the courage and commitment to do what it takes to make Kentucky a great state.

I aspire to more for my children, and to more for the people of Kentucky.

This is not the time to be passive, it's time to be bold.

If our leaders would put forth a vision of what a truly great state we could be, then our taxes will seem like an investment rather than a burden.

So along with support for the goals in Rep. Wayne's bill, I'm also asking our legislators for courage, leadership and commitment to the broader goal of making Kentucky a great state to live, raise a family and do business.

I believe people would be excited about the possibility.