

USS President's Notes



This year has flown by and I'm so proud of each and every one of our University Support Staff! As I go around campus, I hear and see how you continue to encourage one another, take pride in what you do and work hard each and every day to make K-State a great place to be. Your stories continue to amaze me and give me encouragement. Keep up that positive spirit!

This year has been challenging. To start, there was the Hale Library fire, which displaced a multitude of contents and many employees. However, through this time, we came together and made and continued to make the best out of a very difficult situation. We've had an interesting winter which required "all

hands on deck" and the response teams did amazing to ensure our campus was safe and open for business. Spring has sprung bringing an abundance of rainfall. Everyone be safe in these times of flooding and uncertainty.

Former K-State Athletics Director, John Currie, best said it. "Our USS employees are often unsung heroes of a student's experience at K-State. Whether creatively finding ways to stretch dollars for more impact, volunteering personal time to counsel a student club or activity, or just greeting visitors with a warm K-State smile, USS employees show their loyalty and dedication every day."

I believe this to be true of each of you. You are loyal and dedicated to higher education, have a strong work ethic and want to make a positive difference in the lives of others. Generally speaking, you are passionate about what you do.

Stay strong and reach out to a USS Senator with any questions or concerns you may have and we'll do our best to make working at K-State a great experience!

Becki Bohnenblust



State Employee Health Insurance Rate information

The information below was published in the Topeka Capital-Journal.

The panel tasked with setting state employee health insurance rates voted Monday to provide relief to workers who shouldered **years of skyrocketing increases after the state slashed its own contributions.**

State employees will see 6 percent reductions or keep payments flat next year while the state increases payments by 4.5 percent.

The Kansas Employees Health Care Commission voted unanimously to make the changes and slam the brakes on a five-year trend in which premiums for some state employee groups increased by 115.5 percent.

Members of the five-member commission include Kansas Insurance Commissioner Vicki Schmidt, a Republican, and Duane Goossen, the interim secretary of administration under Gov. Laura Kelly, a Democrat.

Under former Gov. Sam Brownback, the state reduced contributions by 8.5 percent in 2015 to free up cash and balance the state budget, then imposed rate increases from 2016-18 of 36.7 percent, 30.4 percent and 31.7 percent for employees with spouses or families participating in the state insurance plan.

“There was no way an employee could have begun to plan for those types of increases,” Schmidt said. “Our employees are working hard every day, and I think it was pretty shocking in October to get that brochure.” As the burden of supporting the health fund shifted to employees, fund reserves dropped from \$195 million in 2014 to a low of \$24 million in 2017.

“You can argue pretty conclusively the reason the balance slipped so low is the state lowered its contributions substantially at a time when expenses were going up,” Goossen said.

Under changes adopted Monday, the reserve balance is expected to increase from \$48 million to \$52 million next year.

Before taking action, the commission heard from Cheryl Buxton, president of the Employee Advisory Committee, which is made up of current and former employees who are active in the health insurance plan.

Costs vary depending on the plan type and group. Employees with a spouse currently pay between \$93 and \$263 in biweekly premiums. For an employee only, the biweekly cost ranges from \$23 to \$40.

Buxton said employees wanted no change to employee-only rates and a 5 percent reduction for employees with spouses and families, as well as a 5 percent cut for retirees who saw a 74.1 percent increase over the past five years.

The committee instead approved a 6 percent reduction for spouses, families and retiree rates while holding others flat.

Buxton said employees will be pleased with the combination of decreased health insurance costs and a pay increase the Legislature included in the new state budget. “That’s going to be a win-win on two fronts in one year,” Buxton said.

Goossen said the state still is “a long way” from restoring the relative balance between employer and employee for overall health plan costs. Commissioners expressed interest in passing along more savings, but long-term outlooks showed modest increases would be needed to maintain a targeted reserve balance as health costs rise.

“I would not support getting wild and crazy with minus 30 percent increases,” Schmidt said. “We have to be responsible, I understand. We’re adulting now.”

The committee also approved savings for employees using Plan C, a high-deductible plan. After the deductible is met, employees will pay 10 percent of health costs instead of the current 20 percent rate.

Additionally, employees who leave state jobs will be allowed to keep their health insurance through the end of the month. A Brownback-era policy kicked workers off the insurance plan the day their employment ended.

HEALTH INSURANCE RATE CHANGES

Group	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
State	-8.5%	0%	7%	7.7%	3.3%	4.5%
Employee	0%	6.4%	9%	7.7%	3.3%	0%
Employee and spouse	0%	36.7%	30.4%	31.7%	16.7%	-6%
Employee and children	0%	6.4%	9%	7.7%	3.3%	0%
Employee and family	0%	36.7%	30.4%	31.7%	16.7%	-6%
Retirees	0%	21.3%	46.1%	0%	6.7%	-6%
Reserve funds	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Balance	\$195M	\$125M	\$32M	\$24M	\$31M	\$48M

What's New...

USS Senate Officers 2019-2020

- President** – Cyreathia Reyer (Sam)
- Vice President** – Cynthia Slover
- Secretary** – Vickey Grochowski
- Treasurer** – Kelly Ingalsbe
- At-Large** – Dennis Ryan

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USS Senate Webpage

View Open Forums, read monthly meeting minutes, see events and announcements, and other information visit our webpage.

<https://www.k-state.edu/ussf/>

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Contact USS Senate

Send questions and concerns via email.

ussenate@ksu.edu

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University Support Staff Senate Meetings

Meetings are held the second Wednesday of each month at 1 p.m. All meetings are located in the K-State Union, Cottonwood Room (unless, otherwise noted below).

- July 10, 2019
- August 14, 2019
- September 11, 2019
- October 9, 2019
- November 13, 2019
- December 11, 2019

Executive Council meets at noon prior to Senate meetings.
Senate committees meet at 12:30 p.m. prior to Senate meetings.

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KUDO's – Special Thanks!

We are renovating the "Bragging Rights" section on the webpage to "KUDO's". When someone has gone the extra mile, or has done more than expected you can show them your thanks by sending them a KUDO. The KUDO is for any USS employee and can be from any K-State employee. Just complete the form on the webpage. We will post your special Thank You.

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Senator Roles and Responsibilities

In addition to monthly meetings where your senators gather to work through issues that are important to the university's support staff, senators are also busy throughout the year serving on committees that focus on areas of specific concern. The 2018/19 school year saw many achievements through committee involvement.

- Members of the Campus Recycling Advisory Committee helped ensure the success of Recycle Mania. K-State was crowned the Big 12 Recycling Champion in 2019. Way to go!
- Senators who have been involved in searches for filling positions of Deans and above have been able to provide valuable input into hiring the people who will be the best fit for the university.
- On the Parking Council, Jeff Barnes has been selected as the new Director of Parking and Transportation. He has some interesting ideas for future improvements. The good news is that current parking pass prices will not be increasing for 2019.
- As part of the committee for implementing the smoking ban, committee members helped usher in the campus-wide smoking ban that became effective June 1, 2018.
- The President's Commission on Multicultural Affairs has been busy evaluating the progress on the 2025 strategic plan. The committee is also reviewing recent low graduation numbers based on gender and ethnicity. The State of Diversity event is also a part of this committee.
- The President's Commission on the Status of Women has been discussing topics for educational flyers that will be placed in restrooms and lactation stations across campus. The committee has also disbursed funds in the fall and spring for professional development opportunities.
- University Affairs coordinated a booth at the annual Benefits Fair and hosted open forums during the fall and spring semester where questions were asked and information provided to a large audience.
- Recognition Ceremony coordinated and hosted the annual Employee Recognition Ceremony where about 300 USS employees were recognized for their accomplishments and years of service.
- Joint Leadership meetings are held quarterly with Faculty Senate, Professional Staff and Student Body where discussions on how we can better work together towards the common goal of making K-State great. Results have been positive with USS Leadership being invited to participate in Faculty Senate committees and there is a potential for combined forums.
- The USS President provides updates to the President's Advisory Council/Cabinet quarterly, represents senate at Landon Lectures, participates with Kansas Board of Regents (KBOR) University Support Staff Council monthly and reviews Honorary Degree nominations.
- Monthly update meetings are held with the Vice Presidents of Administration and Finance and Human Capital Services. Due to decreasing budgets, some colleges/units no longer hire USS staff by attrition or have allowed USS staff to switch to unclassified professionals. This is always a topic at the forefront of discussions.

Committee involvement by USS senators ensures that University Support Staff employees have a voice in decisions being made for the campus. We are honored to serve and hope that future involvement brings about positive changes for our university. If you have any questions or comments about issues discussed in the above committees, please let us know so we can serve you better.