**T R A N S C R I P T**

ECHO VAN METEREN FOR KANSAS SENATE PRESS CONFERENCE

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Good Afternoon. Thank you for joining me here today.

As I've talked with voters, it has become very clear that Kansans are concerned about two things above all else in this election: education and public safety.

Regarding education, there is a growing concern that our teachers aren't being adequately compensated for the important jobs that they do and the roles they play in shaping our children's lives. Voters are also frustrated that the funding increases they support for education never seem to make it into the classroom and, in particular, do not show up in a meaningful way in the paychecks of our teachers.

As to public safety, with each bombing, mass shooting, knife attack, riot, or murder, voters become increasingly anxious that not enough is being done to take criminals off the street and keep them off the street. What many don't realize, however, is how low on our list of spending priorities public safety personnel, and correctional officers in particular, have been allowed to slip. Few Kansans realize that a correctional officer starts out at $13.68 per hour. That's less than some make working in a fast food restaurant. For that meager compensation, we lock these brave men and women behind bars with unimaginably violent, aggressive and brutal criminals. Few of us want to even think about what these men and women in uniform have to see and deal with on nearly a daily basis.

As I listened to voters concerns in the areas of education and public safety, I began to think about what can realistically be done in the immediate future to improve their lives and financial situations. What can we do right now to demonstrate that we do value their service and appreciate the important jobs they have to do.

Obviously, there are political and economic realities facing our state and those who wants to affect real change and provide real solutions to problems like these.

So let's address the economic realities first. It is no secret that many state governments in this region, and a majority of the states nationwide, are struggling to keep up with the demands being placed on them by their voters and the federal government. Though much noise has been made about the state of our economy and budget, we're hardly alone. Here in Kansas, the challenge facing the leaders of both parties is that we have an economy that is largely based on agriculture, petroleum, and aviation -- all three of which are experiencing slumps right now. As a result, tax collections, though higher in real dollars than they've ever been, aren't keeping up with the estimates projected several months ago by forecasters, on which our state budgets are built. The bottom line is that times are tough in the field, in the oil patch, and on the production floor and that requires tough decisions to be made.

Then there are the political realities. While some advocate raising taxes in order to increase funding for education and public safety, it is a virtual certainty that any plan to raise taxes will be vetoed in the next two years. Others believe that taxpayers are already over-burdened and that to raise taxes will blunt economic growth in our state. Still others are rightly concerned that we not rob other vital areas of state spending such as roads, parks, health and social services to fund pay increases for our teachers and correctional officers.

So with all of these economic and political realities in mind, I began to consider what, then, can actually be done to help improve the lives of teachers and correctional officers? Is there something that lawmakers can do that would draw the support of both Republicans and Democrats, liberals, moderates and conservatives, the Governor and legislative leaders?

I'm happy to announce that the answer is yes. Thereis something we can do immediately when the Legislature convenes in January.

Today, I am announcing that, upon election, I will pre-file a bill to eliminate the state income tax entirely for full-time teachers and correctional officers in Kansas. If passed, this will result in a substantial and immediate increase in take-home pay for both teachers and correctional officers. While there are layers of bureaucracy between the Legislature and these front-line employees that prevent us from being able to grant them direct pay increases, this is something we can do directly to improve the lives of these valued public servants without having to seek the approval of administrators, school boards, unions or corrections supervisors and that is to simply stop requiring them to pay state income tax. This proposal will provide a real, tangible financial boost to our teachers and corrections officers and that, in turn, will spur additional economic growth as their investing and buying power increases.

There's a famous quote that says, "If you want less of something, tax it.” The opposite is also true. If you want more of something, stop taxing it. Obviously, we want to increase the number of quality teachers and correctional officers. Eliminating the income tax on these professions will accomplish that. Given our state's current fiscal and political realities, the easiest, simplest, and most direct way to increase the take-home pay of these valued public servants is to simply eliminate their state income tax burden and let them keep the money they’ve earned. Small business owners already have been granted this benefit. Why not teachers and corrections officers?

There may be those who decry this proposal for what they fear may be its impact on the state's budget. Well, I want to assure them that not only will the impact on the state budget be slight, barely noticeable even, but we will be accomplishing what many of the same critics have been saying all along has been their goal: to increase the take-home pay of these vital public servants.

The political reality facing those who advocate for raising taxes so we can pass those funds back to our teachers and corrections officers is that no tax increase stands a chance of becoming law in the near future. So in the meantime, the question we need to answer is if we allow our teachers and corrections officers to continue to go without an improvement in their financial situations? Or do we come together -- Republicans and Democrats, conservative, moderates, and liberals, Governor, and lawmakers, to take this action that will provide an immediate, direct, and very meaningful benefit to our teachers and corrections officers?

My goal in running for the Kansas Senate is to get beyond the rivalries, scorekeeping, and toxic politics that are choking out real progress in Topeka and come together to actually solve some of these problems. I am a Republican but I'm willing to work with anyone who is willing to work with me to solve problems like these. This proposal is, I hope, just a down payment on what will be a new approach to solving problems with creativity, collegiality, and respect.

I am happy to stand for questions.