

February 2, 2021

In December of 2014 I documented the situation of being a temporary employee. September of 2015 I was finally made an FTE after my managers devised a plan to make me a permanent employee after 8.5 years of being temporary. The division administrative assistant had retired and had not yet been replaced. They worked with OMB to combine my duties in cultural resource management as 80% of the position and administrative duties as 20% percent. While this was a win for me to finally be able to participate in the retirement system, have quality healthcare without bleeding my bank account dry, and have access to paid time off as well as other perks, it was a disadvantage to my team in Cultural Resources because they lost at least 20% of my availability for highway projects. It had apparently been decided that we would not be pursuing an FTE position to be dedicated solely towards the archaeological and historic preservation needs of the department despite our legal obligations to do this work.

In March of 2016 I learned how lucky I was to have been brought on as an FTE. My coworker who was a temporary employee was suddenly let go the day before he was to close on his home. This was a hard blow for him and our team. The coworker this temporary person closely coordinated with is now doing both sets of job duties to this day.

I often wonder how much I am missing in retirement benefits due to being held in limbo as a temporary employee for 8.5 years, what would that be with compounded interest? Could I have my student loans paid off by now if I hadn't had to choose to put \$400 give or take per month towards having health insurance all of those years. Could I have swung getting a Masters degree during those years of employment had tuition reimbursement been a possibility for me? How much further ahead I could be had I been an FTE versus a temporary employee for those 8.5 years?

Today the situation doesn't seem to have improved. The state of ND has over 2200 temporary employees and the majority are working full-time, the majority of which are women, a protected class that is clearly being taken for granted and advantage of. 25% of the full-time temporary employees are receiving health benefits. The main reason this percent is so low is because they are paying premiums for just single coverage it is \$687 and \$1,656 for family. The agency may choose to cover some amount of that, which may explain why 25% have opted in for coverage, but that data was not provided. The one nice thing about this is that these employees can choose to go to the marketplace and select other coverage and not have to worry about pre-existing conditions preventing them from having an option in what they can afford to pay for a premium, but this does not ensure that people are getting quality insurance or accessibility to the care they may need. How can one choose to put 10% towards retirement, purchase health insurance at this obscene cost, pay for food and shelter let alone childcare or anything else? Are these state employees surviving as wards of the state, with Medicaid and SNAP benefits to get by?

My concern is that the state of ND is treating temporary employees like interns or worse. Walmart, Target, and Starbucks all provide healthcare at little cost to their employees. I think we have all heard about Walmart employees living on food stamps and low-income housing. Two of these employers I have worked for, and they also provide paid time off. Starbucks provides investment opportunities and is even investing in their employee's education. ND holds on to their temporary

employees indefinitely because these are needed and necessary positions, which are integral to the function of these agencies. Nearly half of the temporary employees are working for Dept of Health. I cannot imagine how an agency would function without 984 employees. This is creating an imbalance in our working environment. We certainly do not do this to our contractors. They are paid enough to cover their employee's wages, insurance, retirement and other overhead costs. We are not paying employees enough to cover these costs and come out with a living wage. We can tell these people to pull themselves up by their bootstraps, but they can't even afford to buy bootstraps. They can't afford to stay home sick. They can't afford to take a needed vacation or time off to care for a loved one.

There is a line between being fiscally responsible and just taking advantage of your community and work force. Obviously, these are not temporary positions and either the state chooses to remain exploiting their human resources, or their status needs to be changed. The state of ND has made it clear what benefits an employee deserves, to be successful and well compensated, but has also drawn a line in the sand that temporary employees should be disenfranchised. All employees need to be able to afford to contribute to their retirements, healthcare, and not just paying off debt, but also fully able to participate in supporting their communities economically.

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