



Sorry, Non-KC Residents . . . The Star Doesn't Care for Your Opinion

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It should be no surprise that people living outside the city limits of Kansas City and St. Louis are interested in what happens in those cities and the ways in which urban policies affect regional prosperity. To take one obvious example, thousands of people who work but don't live in these cities are directly affected by the earnings taxes they pay. Their opinions matter, too.

That's why I was startled at the tone of yesterday's [Kansas City Star editorial](#). The piece targets an individual lawmaker, but it sketches out a remarkably shallow framework for attacking critics of the earnings tax now that its repeal will likely be considered in the next few months. The editorial board can do better, and the *Star's* readers—Kansas City residents, suburbanites and exurbanites alike—deserve better.

First, the board's dismissal of the concerns of residents and lawmakers from "little" Missouri towns—on the grounds that only those who live within the boundaries of one of the cities should have a say in the earnings tax debate—doesn't hold up to scrutiny. After all, some of the *Star's* own executive staff don't even live in the same *state* as the earnings taxes in question. If the standard for valid earnings tax opinions is residency, then the *Star* would be forced to dismiss its own opinion. The board should consider a better limiting principle for who can join the debate if it

wants to remain a part of it.

Second, the *Star's* sudden appreciation for local decision-making could well strike long-time readers as curious at best. Where was this zeal for local control as the federal government has issued sweeping mandates in education and health care? I could write a whole blog about the difference in the relationship between the federal government and states (sovereigns) and the relationship between states and the cities within them (subdivisions), but it isn't clear to me whether The Star's local-government argument here is being made seriously or instead is being offered as a *tu quoque* to supporters of small government.

Third, as St. Louis City particularly shows, when the hub of a metropolitan area fails, the region flounders, too. The *Star* says, in short, that the rest of the state should mind its own business regarding the earnings tax—but arguing that my next-door neighbor's house fire shouldn't concern me until my own house bursts into flames is the kind of nonsense that has scorched the economic prospects of the St. Louis region for decades. The *Star* doesn't constrain [its own commentary](#) to matters directly related to Kansas City, Missouri; that it would attempt to delegitimize the opinions of others on the earnings tax question runs precisely counter to what the newspaper should be about.

Lastly, the complaint that a Senator's proposed legislation is effectively invalid because the impact would be felt outside his district is an objection that would apply to nearly all statewide legislation. I don't recall the *Star* objecting on those grounds to proposals by Kansas City politicians for tax increases, health care impositions, or other legislative measures that would affect locales other than (or in addition to) Kansas City.

Show-Me Institute writers have shared a fairly consistent opinion on earnings taxes for well over a decade from our offices in both St. Louis and Kansas City. We have opposed them, for the same reason we have been consistently skeptical of the state's income tax: Both taxes hurt economic growth and, ultimately, hurt people. The earnings taxes imposed by Kansas City and St. Louis are especially pernicious and regressive because in contrast to the state's income tax, the earnings taxes attach to earnings at dollar one, meaning the impact on the poor is especially pronounced.

Kansas City's political class is on the wrong side of history in trying to prop up the earnings tax, not only because it will eventually go away, but because as policy and as a moral matter, it needs to go away.

So yes, people living outside of Kansas City and St. Louis can and do have an interest in how those cities' policies impact their regions', and the state's, prosperity. Rather than resort to *ad hominem* attacks, the *Star* would do well to focus on the argument and the policies involved and explain to readers why, unlike thousands of cities across the country, Kansas City and St. Louis couldn't survive without an earnings tax.

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