



## The Dastardly Art of Freshman Pawning

From [Oklahoma State Representative Jason Murphey \(R-Guthrie\)](#):



Much of the time and energy of this legislative session was consumed by the push to raise taxes, even if those taxes were unconstitutional.

This push was led by a group of “increase taxes at all cost” ideologues who deployed an array of tactics and strategies to convince their colleagues to raise taxes.

One such tactic utilized the deployment of the most systematic and aggressive strategy of freshman pawning that I have ever seen.

What is freshman pawning, you ask?

Freshman pawning is a particularly dastardly strategy utilized by appropriations leaders to give the newest legislators direct ownership of some of the most controversial components of appropriation leadership’s agenda.

I saw this first hand as a member of the House Appropriations Committee where I often witnessed a freshman legislator presenting a tax increase on behalf of the Appropriations Committee Chairperson.

It is a great honor for a new legislator to receive a request for help from the high ranking appropriations leaders.

They would likely make their request after a bit of flattery.

“You are doing a great job so far. We have a complicated tax policy bill and will need someone with your intellectual firepower to guide it through the process. Would you be able to present the bill on our behalf?”

How does a freshman say “no” to this request?

It takes wisdom to see through this flattery and tremendous courage to stand up to the pressure and say, “No, thank you.”

This is an effective strategy because upon acquiescing, the new legislator has officially bought into the tax increase scheme and “joined the team.”

Not only are they now supporting value-betraying tax increases, they are actively sponsoring them. They have become a key part of the team effort to “find solutions” by raising taxes.

This made them quite susceptible to voting for the other tax increases — including those that were clearly unconstitutional. After all, it’s hardly fair for the new lawmaker to ask other legislators to vote for “his” tax increase when he is unwilling to vote for theirs.

You can only imagine how much pressure is placed on new lawmakers.

You should also know that not all new legislators bought into the scheme. I had tremendous respect for



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those who found a way to escape being pawned.

I absolutely hated to see this aggressive policy of freshman pawning. It will haunt the legislature and the people of Oklahoma for years to come.

There were hardened, politically secure legislators who have long ago given up on enacting true oversight and implementing efficiencies; they would have happily presented the tax increase bills. There was absolutely no actual need to encumber the new lawmakers with such political toxicity.

These new lawmakers were not guilty of the sins of the veteran House members that put the state into a fiscal crunch. They had not voted for the many millions of bonds and debt, they had not greatly expanded the state's medical welfare system, they weren't responsible for the state's record high spend level of nearly 19 billion dollars last year and they had not failed to reform the budget and fiscal oversight system. There was certainly no obligation on them to betray their core principles and raise taxes.

At the start of the session, many freshman legislators still believed they could hold government accountable. They wanted to find new efficiencies and cut costs. Had our appropriations officials invested as much time and energy into reforming the system as they invested into raising taxes, the new legislators would have been in near unanimous support.

Just weeks earlier, I don't think any of these individuals would have even considered voting in favor of clearly unconstitutional tax raises — and most certainly wouldn't have believed they would be the ones to present tax increase bills.

Now that session is over, they have a decision to make. They can come to terms with what happened to them, understand how they were used, and earn redemption next year; or, unfortunately, I'm afraid that most will give in to the all-too-human tendency of denial.

If so, they will convince themselves that there was no other way than to increase taxes, and they will consider themselves to be "enlightened" as to the true state of state government.

This new state of enlightenment leaves little ability to see and understand the true problem: the state's tendency to spend money — spending that has resulted in a record high of nearly 19 billion dollars, legislators who are unwilling to take on the sacred cows of inappropriate and inefficient government spend, and a completely broken legislative budget process that provides lawmakers with only a modicum of oversight and no comprehensive purview of actual state spend.

Next week I will describe more of the tactics used by those who endeavored to raise your taxes.

*Permission was given to reprint this article in its entirety by Oklahoma State Representative Jason Murphey (R-Guthrie). To read a follow-up, [click here](#).*



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