

SOME LEGISLATORS WANT TO SPEND TAX DOLLARS, NOT PAY THEM

Let me say unequivocally that Rep. Al Williams, D-Midway, and I are on the same page regarding the fact that the Georgia Department of Revenue says Williams and about 10 percent of his colleagues in the Georgia General Assembly are delinquent in paying their taxes. Williams, who reportedly owes the state \$42,672 in back taxes and has a lien of \$73,049 on property in Midway, calls the whole thing “crap.” I couldn’t agree more.

Of course, Williams’ definition of “crap” and mine differ slightly. I think it is crap that this guy hasn’t paid his taxes and is acting like some kind of aggrieved victim and making all kinds of whiny excuses. If you and I tried to do the same thing, we would be having this conversation in Reidsville State Prison.

The fact is that he has been identified along with a number of other members of the Legislature who evidently think paying taxes is for peons. As of this writing, only a few names are known, but all should become public information in the very near future. State Revenue Commissioner Bart Graham says that 22 legislators — Democrats and Republicans, senators and representatives — can be categorized as “repeat offenders,” some for as long as six years.

Senate Minority Leader Robert Brown, D-Macon, told Atlanta television station WXIA that he had not filed federal or state income taxes at least in the past two years. However, Brown hastens to add that he had filed for extensions and was “exercising the same rules” anyone else can by filing for extensions. Maybe he knows something I don’t know, but tax experts say that even if you file for an extension you still need to pay something, otherwise you are subject to substantial penalties if it is determined you owe money to the government.

In response to this sorry state of affairs, Sen. Eric Johnson, R-Savannah, introduced a bill that would let the state Senate more quickly investigate probable tax evaders in the Legislature. Sen. Brown responded by playing the race card. (He is black; Johnson is white.) The minority leader went to the well of the Senate and brandished a picture of Sen. Johnson riding in the St. Patrick’s Day parade and holding what looks to be a Confederate flag. It is, in fact, the old Georgia state flag, which at the time the picture was taken was the official flag of our state. I guess playing the race card is cheaper than paying your taxes, and it doesn’t take near as much integrity.

I know a number of members of the General Assembly, and despite my occasionally tweaking and twitting them, the vast majority in both parties are good people trying to do a good job for us. (Remember, 90 percent of the legislators did pay their taxes on time.) I just hope they understand what an aspersion the alleged tax evaders have cast on the rest of them.

It will be interesting to see how all of this will play out over the coming weeks and months. You can bet that when all the names are known, you will hear more squealing than a pig farm at feeding time. My fervent hope is that the General Assembly will have the guts to punish those found guilty of tax evasion and toss them out on their duffs.

Or will we witness Democrats defending Democrats and Republicans defending Republicans and Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton barging into town and trying to turn the whole thing into a racial issue? Or will politicians assume that we will become distracted by other matters and forget the whole thing? That’s not likely.

Most folks will give our politicians a lot of room when it comes to things like being wined and dined by lobbyists, getting free tickets to events we can’t afford to attend and bopping around on private jets. But thinking you can live by a different set of rules than the rest of us and that tax dollars are something to be spent and not paid? That, my friends, is just a pile of — well, you know.