By Russ Pankonin, The Imperial Republican Co-Publisher

My teacher friends aren't going to like this one bit but I believe the $64,697 in cash savings generated for the school by a one-month health insurance premium holiday should ultimately be used to reduce the tax request made by the school.

I believe we've got great teachers in our school system and I have a great respect for what they do. That's never been an issue for me. This isn't an issue about teachers. It's an issue about taxes and the people who pay them.

During this month's school board meeting, a number of teachers voiced their opinion that this money should go back, in part or in whole, to them and the members of the classified staff.

It was suggested that since the school doesn't have to outlay this money this year, it throws off the negotiated percentages of what the school must spend for salaries and spend for insurance.

The question I ask myself: How is teaching staff adversely affected by the school saving that money? Frankly, I can't see how they are. They are still receiving their negotiated salaries and their negotiated insurance benefits.

Keep in mind that it's tax money that pays those monthly premiums (and salaries). So the benefit that results in the form of a premium holiday should go back to those who paid it in the first place—the taxpayer.

Teachers here have been fortunate to be spared the sticker shock that many of us have experienced when paying our own health insurance premiums. Frankly, I don't know of many jobs in this community where all of an employee's health insurance is paid entirely by the employer.

Not only does the school pay in full for a single policy, they do it for spouse and family policies as well. I'll almost guarantee there's not a job in town with that benefit.

If the teachers were paying a portion of the premiums themselves, I would have no problem giving that money back to them. But that's not the case.

Another question: If insurance premiums increased after negotiations were complete, would those same teachers be willing to pay that difference?

For the new budget year, the school requested an additional $513,000 in taxes over last year. While higher valuations may have reduced the tax levy, total tax asking still went up.

The $64,697 in question would offset that $513,000 increase by 12.6 percent.

The prudent action for the board would be to return the money to the general fund and reduce the tax request accordingly next year; or, amend this year's budget to keep that money in the hands of taxpayers this year.