

Taxpayers Bankroll 'Unlimited' Union Lobbying

Once Obscure 'Release Time' Deal Now Raises Hackles in California

This year, Californians will fork out nearly \$11,900 apiece in federal, state and local taxes, according to the projection of the nonpartisan, Washington, D.C.-based Tax Foundation.

Californians are strapped by a heavier tax burden as a percentage of their income than are residents of 41 of the 49 other states.

At the same time, the Golden State's per capita income, when adjusted to account for the extraordinarily high cost of living in coastal California, is well below the national average.

The deadly combination of high taxes and high living costs has already spurred a net total of more than 2.6 million residents and countless businesses to flee the state since 1990.

Democratic, Republican Administrations Alike Have Kowtowed to CCPOA Kingpins

And power-hungry, irresponsible public-sector union bosses and the politicians who do their bidding are the greatest single cause of the problem.

"To stop government union bosses from ripping off taxpayers, the California Legislature and Gov. [Arnold] Schwarzenegger [R] need first to make them accountable to the employees they purport to represent," said Matthew Leen, vice president of the National Right to Work Committee.

"The first step would be for legislators and the governor to stop including in state contracts provisions authorizing union officials to get employees fired for refusal to pay dues or fees to an unwanted union."

The numerous government-granted special privileges of the California Correctional Peace Officers Association (CCPOA) union hierarchy are illustrative of how taxpayers are being bilked.

In mid-June, many ordinary Californians were astonished to read in the Orange County *Register* that union officials can devote an essentially "unlimited amount of working hours to union business," mostly politics and lobbying, on the taxpayer dime.

CCPOA union officials are able to pull this off through exploitation of a so-called "release time bank." It allows union bosses to take weeks and weeks of paid time off to do union business by



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In 2001, then-Gov. Gray Davis's (D) negotiating team extended a deal permitting essentially "unlimited"

lobbying by union officials on the taxpayer dime. Until recently, taxpayers knew nothing about it.

persuading the union rank-and-file to "contribute" their unused vacation days and holiday leave time.

Eight years ago, under then-Gov. Pete Wilson's (R) watch, government negotiators sneakily signed a "side letter" authorizing unlimited CCPOA-boss "release time," notwithstanding a contract provision setting a 10,000-hour cap.

The "side letter" was never submitted to the California legislators who are by law required to cast up-or-down votes on all deals affecting the terms of employment of unionized state government workers.

Four years later, Big Labor Gov. Gray Davis (D) picked the government's negotiators.

By her own admission, Linda Buzzini, Mr. Davis' chief negotiator, once again sent a contract to the Legislature with a provision setting a 10,000-hour cap on "release time," while at the same time she cut a separate deal making the cap meaningless.

Ms. Buzzini now says that the never-enforced 10,000-hour cap remained in the contract simply through an "oversight."

The only reason California citizens finally know today that they are paying with their tax dollars for "unlimited" lobbying by CCPOA officers is because the current governor, Mr. Schwarzenegger, was recently bold or naïve enough to try to enforce the

10,000-hour cap.

In mid-June, when arbitrator Carol Vendrillo informed the governor he could not do so, California newspapers and other media informed the public for the first time about the "side deals" cut by the Wilson and Davis administrations with the CCPOA brass.

Public-Sector Forced Unionism Is the Source Of Taxpayers' Affliction

Once the truth was out, it caused a statewide furor. Embarrassed legislators claimed that in the future they would exercise better oversight over the state union contracts that are submitted for their ratification or rejection.

But that's missing the point, charged Mr. Leen.

"Without their forced-dues power over prison guards, I very much doubt the CCPOA political operatives would be so cavalier about hitting them up for their 'unused' vacation time. And many other Big Labor abuses would also be deterred," he explained.

Mr. Leen urged Right to Work members in California to contact their state legislators (for help, see <http://www.cdfa.org/legislators.html>) and Gov. Schwarzenegger (916-445-2841) and ask them to oppose the inclusion of any forced-dues provision in the CCPOA's 2006 contract. 📧