



Written by [Bruce Walker](#) on June 28, 2010

Public Employees Unions Lose Friends

Public-employee labor unions have long been an unchecked tap upon the public treasury. Sometimes these unions have an aura of moral purpose, like police and firefighters' unions. Others work in hospitals or teach in schools, positions that have historically been viewed sympathetically by many Americans. Other unions, like garbage collectors and water-line workers, could cause immediate and serious harm to the public, if they went on strike.



On top of that, these public-employees unions have been very well organized and these unions have poured money and workers into political campaigns of interest. The potent punch of public employees unions have produced a lot of close connections between career politicians and the unions.

Stephen M. Sweeney, President of the State Senate in New Jersey, has lashed out against one New Jersey town that paid out nearly \$1 million to four retiring police officers for their unused sick days and vacation time. Sweeney, himself, is a boss of a local ironworkers' union. The Democrat is now joining Republicans who have been warning for years about the dangers of limitless labor union demands.

Ted Kulongoski, Governor of Oregon, used to represent state employees' unions, but now he is demanding that his old clients accept wage concessions. Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa was a teachers' union organizer. Now he is demanding that his old unions give back \$100 millions in wages and benefits. New York Governor David Patterson long supported unions and his father works for unions, but Patterson is threatening to lay off public employees unless their unions accept a pay freeze.

These three Democrats have historically been big pals of public employee labor unions, and unions have duly rewarded them. Economic necessity is driving those very politicians who once supported union demands that could not possibly be met over the long haul to now insist that public employees unions take a smaller bite of the tax pie. Some of these Democrats, however, are finding that a very frustrated public views these "protected" public employees' unions as selfish and unreasonable. Fighting these unions may be good politics as well.

This is particularly true because most Republicans have been warning for years about the grave dangers of these unions' sky-high wages, benefits, and pensions. Few, if any, Republicans are likely to attack a pro-labor Democrat for standing up to public employees' unions. Governor Christie in New Jersey, for example, has led the way in challenging the "business as usual" attitude of public employees unions. And the public — even those who have tended to pine for school teachers or loyally support policemen — can see now in stark terms just how bad public employees unions have made state and local government.



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It has been clear for a long time that granting public employees the right to organize and to strike was a ticking time bomb. As long as the management decisions were essentially political and as long as the public employees unions made it their special business to elect friends and to defeat enemies, no natural market forces could prevent grossly irresponsible contracts with these unions. The time bomb, though, has ticked down. The shock waves from the explosion are rippling all across the nation. Politicians are running away from the very unions whose grotesque expansion they once fostered.



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