



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on June 2, 2011

Federal Govt Begins to Scrutinize Unions

American taxpayers may be interested to know that even as union bad behavior has seemingly been growing out of control, as unions remain some of the largest contributors to Democratic campaigns, and while the nation continues to struggle with massive unemployment, taxpayers continue to be burdened by the increasing cost of unions. Lawmakers in Washington are beginning to turn their attention to these costs and pursue measures by which taxpayer money may be spared.



For example, politicians are beginning to call into question the fact that federal employees of unionized agencies are not required to join the union or pay mandatory dues.

Additionally, Washington lawmakers are scrutinizing something known as official time. Fox News explains:

Official time is a federal term for the hours spent by union officials employed by the government conducting union business. The officials are paid their normal government salaries for this work on behalf of the unions.

Official time is seen by supporters as compensation for the fact that unions are required to handle labor issues related to all employees, not just union members. When union officials negotiate with federal managers over work rules, such as appropriate attire and other human resource requirements, those functions are carried out under official time.

This provision, which became law in 1978 under President Jimmy Carter, allowed for the use of time for union-related business so long as it was negotiated with management and agreed "to be reasonable, necessary, and in the public interest."

Republicans contend it is no longer a reasonable provision. According to Representative Dennis Ross, (R-Fla.), official time is nothing more than "charity" for federal employees. He explains, "This came at a cost of \$129 million to American taxpayers," which amounts to approximately three million hours of official time.

Overall, Republicans have targeted what they perceived to be absurdly high government pay rates and union bullying tactics.

Fox News writes:

Republican Senator Tom Coburn of Oklahoma this week highlighted a report from the Congressional Research Service, first reported by the *Washington Times*, which found 77,000 federal employees earn a higher salary than their respective governors. A union representing federal employees said the bigger problem is payments to contractors, not government workers.



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Representative Stephen Lynch (D-Mass.) contends that Republicans are merely targeting unions and argues that official time is fair. He declares, "This is absurd. Give me a break."

Likewise, unions assert that official time allows for a more efficient government, and ultimately saves money.

John Gage, president of the American Federation of Government Employees, said, "If workers and managements are really communicating, work place problems that would otherwise escalate into costly litigation can be dealt with promptly and more informally."

Republicans disagree. Representative Phil Gingrey of Georgia (pictured above) proposed a bill entitled the Federal Employee Accountability Act of 2011, which repeals parts of the 1978 law, and limits the use of official time.

As the nation's economy continues to struggle, and unemployment remains stuck in the 9 percent range, more lawmakers are finding it difficult to justify the many [privileges](#) awarded to union workers at the taxpayers' expense, particularly as unions have become more brazen, both in their [support](#) of Democrats and in their employment of [thuggery](#) tactics when they are unsatisfied.

Seemingly sensing that the reign of the powerful unions may be close to its demise, unions have become more vigilant about preventing the movement of businesses to right-to-work states, as is seen in the case involving [Boeing and South Carolina](#).

As a result, more than 700 bills targeting public-employee unions have been introduced across the nation, even in ultra liberal states like Massachusetts, where the House of Representatives voted to strip public unions of the right to negotiate their healthcare benefits.

The New American's Bruce Walker [sees](#) potential in the increase of union-targeted measures:

Constitutionalists recognize that forced unions, public-employee unions, and other impressed gangs are not in the best interest of freedom — or of the taxpayer, or even the pampered worker. The purpose of unions is to create quasi-moral citadels of power and privilege. When American politicians, from sea to shining sea, reject these unions, then their days are numbered.

While states across the country have turned their attention to the unions, the federal government has remained relatively idle in this arena, even standing by while the Office of Budget and Management pursues unionization. However, Gingrey's legislation may be an indication that the federal government is prepared to make real reform.



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