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# *PUBLIC SECTOR UNIONS CREATE COST SAVINGS*

The relevance and usefulness of labor unions has been front and center for some time now. Media sources and some political agendas have tried to paint labor in our country as a burden to public-sector employers and a financial drain on local budgets. The common mantra is that collective bargaining produces only liability for employers and hamstrings growth and success.

Noting the importance of labor unions and their positive impact on public-sector employers has never been more crucial. The benefit to taxpayers and citizens can be measured in the numerous joint labor/management relationships that streamline operations and provide substantial cost savings for governmental budgets. Millions of dollars in operational savings can be attributed to the positive working relationships that labor has forged with employers.

Cost savings and efficiencies are often created out of necessity - on the front line. Without union help, municipalities easily become financially inefficient and are less able to provide taxpayer services. The public-sector union philosophy is to make the employer successful in delivering needed services to the taxpayer at costs less than private-sector companies can provide.

What is particularly troublesome about the message currently being presented in the media, and espoused by some politicians, is the conscious effort to avoid,

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rather than address and correct, the real problems that we face. Selling the public on a notion that public-sector benefits and wages cause local and state financial shortfalls is disingenuous.

The common thread in local and state budgetary shortfalls is dwindling tax revenue, job losses to the community, municipal investment shortfalls and home foreclosures. Eliminating frontline workers and civil servants who provide critical services to the public will not provide the solution promised. Often it is a promise of future prosperity that never materializes but instead results in less service and accountability to the taxpayers. It is hard to understand how the egregious and criminal acts of the banking industry, insurance giants, mortgage sector and Wall Street corporate gamblers have been so quietly swept under the rug, while principalities of greed spotlight public employees and their middle-class wages as bankrupting the country.

Working at jobs that provide living wages and decent benefits is not something that we, as Americans, should stop striving to achieve. Our hope should always be that everyone who desires to provide for his or her family has the opportunity to do so. This "race to the bottom" will eventually lead to the genocide of America's middle class and an ever-expanding gap between those of privilege and those who will never have the chance to secure a meaningful job that provides living wages.

The solution to the financial and structural crisis in our country resides in a much bigger playing arena than the low levels of city or state government. If we will be courageous enough to stand up for governmental and corporate accountability; give voice to fair global trade and insist on uniform environmental standards for all countries; demand ethics in our financial and insurance companies as well as oversight of how these industries operate, then we are on the path to lasting recovery and prosperity. Don't ever give in to the siren song that to be successful in the global market, we have to give up our standard of living or accept jobs that don't offer living wages and decent benefits. America has always been the innovator and has its greatest resource and asset in the people who work to make life better for their children than they themselves had.

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