

[Send News](#)[Blogs](#)[Photos](#)[Subscribe](#)[Calendar](#)[Homes](#)[Job](#)[News Search](#)[Web Search](#)[Classified Search](#)[Advertising](#)[Circulation](#)[Reader Services](#)[Traffic](#)[Stocks](#)[Home](#)[News](#)[Sports](#)[Business](#)[Opinion](#)[Entertainment](#)[Features](#)[Columnists](#)[Cor](#)[Subscribe](#)[Previous Issues](#)[Letters](#)[Obituaries](#)[Place An Ad](#)[Send Fee](#)[Print Page](#)**Tuesday, November 8, 2005**

Last modified Saturday, November 5, 2005 9:36 PM PST

Voters must rein in government unions run amok

By: North County Times - Editorial

Our View: Politicians curry favor with high pay instead of better public safety

Several alert letter-writers have accused us of bashing unions on this page. We hereby plead guilty.

Don't get us wrong; we cherish the police, firefighters and teachers who dedicate their careers to public service. The trouble lies with labor unions and allied politicians who just won't stop squeezing taxpayers dry. Union bosses who represent government workers simply have too much power in Sacramento, San Diego and the city halls of North County.

Tuesday's special election presents a historic opportunity for the voting public to rein in these public employee unions.

Voting yes on Propositions 74, 75, 76 and 77 will increase the odds that we can get more police and firefighters in our communities, get our roads fixed and restore our schools to national prominence. Please see Page E-1 for more details.

California is in trouble. Five years of fiscal crisis have paralyzed its government. Meanwhile, the state's infrastructure crumbles, a pension time bomb ticks, and a teetering health care system drags down the economy.

We don't pretend that public employee unions brought all these plagues down upon us. But there is no question that a leading cause is the extraordinary influence of unions at election time and behind the closed doors of state and local government.

In the private sector, unions can play an important role. The best unions help their firms remain competitive with educated, motivated workers.

However, the worst unions take advantage of weak managers to extract ruinous wages and working conditions, eventually bankrupting their employers ---- witness the airline, steel and auto industries.

Unfortunately, the latter description fits California and its public employee unions precisely.

Politicians have come to rely upon government unions for campaign workers and millions of dollars in donations at election time. In return, unions expect concessions for their members. If a city manager or state agency head holds the line at bargaining time, the unions simply go to the ballot box and elect folks who will instruct administrators to be more cooperative next time. It's not a fair fight, and this corrupt dynamic means that nobody is representing taxpayers.

The predictable result is that teachers, firefighters, police, and even ordinary government clerks have gotten big raises, Cadillac health plans and lavish pensions. It dwarfs the compensation seen in equivalent private sector

jobs, and California generally pays far better than other states.

Tom Campbell, California's budget director, points out that the average teacher in the state is paid 25 percent more than the national average, yet the state's cost of living is just 6 percent above the national average. As for the pension goodies, firefighters and police can retire at age 50 with 90 percent or more of their highest pay for life, a benefit that rises with inflation.

"In actuarial terms, we have made them millionaires, sometimes multimillionaires," says Steven Frates, senior fellow at the Rose Institute of State and Local Government at Claremont McKenna College.

Since the 1970s, when lawmakers gave public workers the right to form unions, resources have steadily shifted to this powerful interest group. Our leaders routinely choose to let communities get by with fewer police, firefighters and teachers so the employees who remain can enjoy richer pay and benefits.

It's a choice that elected leaders face every few years in every North County city hall.

Consider Oceanside, where the police union's contract expires in January. We aren't privy to the secret negotiations, but rest assured that the union boss is demanding a big pay raise. It's his job.

On the other side of the table are Mayor Jim Wood and Councilwomen Esther Sanchez and Shari Mackin ---- a voting majority who got heavy union support on Election Day. The Oceanside Three face a big decision.

Similar decisions have been botched by many of our local leaders since unions rose to dominance. On Tuesday, voters must restructure this unhealthy balance of power. We must rid our democracy of this quiet corruption.