



Proposed Union Bailouts: A Means to Buy Union Votes?

On Tuesday May 25, Bradley Blakeman of Fox News wrote an article entitled, “Unions — The OTHER Democratic National Committee,” in which he discussed the incestuous relationship between the Democratic Party and unions. Blakeman writes: “Unions have made no bones about their upcoming involvement in the midterm elections of 2010. In short, unions are scared to death that they will lose their grip on their control of the House and the Senate unless they spend tens of millions of dollars and force their members to campaign for Democratic incumbents.”



In view of this, Democratic Senator Bob Casey’s introduced legislation for a \$165 billion bailout of union pension funds is a blatantly self-serving conflict of interest. The very idea that the taxpayers may shoulder the burden of the bailout package — only to find out that they are indirectly funding Democratic campaigns — is likely to be more than most taxpayers can bear.

On Monday, the Fox Business Network (FBN) reported that the union pensions were struggling as of 2006, even before investment markets dropped and the recession began. Currently, only 6 percent of the funds are successful. Gerri Willis of FBN explains that the liabilities would likely far surpass \$165 billion and could even be unlimited, as the pensions must be paid out until the workers die.

The American Pundit explains that the bill “would put the Pension Benefit Guarantee Corporation behind struggling pensions for union workers.” Casey claims that he is introducing the bill in order to “save jobs and help people.”

People — one might ask — or votes?

In addition to Casey’s proposed union bailout, Education Secretary Arne Duncan has asked that lawmakers consider a request of \$23 billion in “emergency” funding for public schools. Republicans have massively rejected the measure, indicating that it is nothing more than a federal bailout for teachers’ unions, but Duncan has asked that lawmakers set aside “politics and ideology” in the consideration of this request. One wonders if Duncan would make the same argument if the tobacco industry made a similar request.

The bill has been titled “Keep Our Educators Working Act” and was sponsored by Democratic Representative George Miller and Democratic Senator Tom Harkin. President Obama has already indicated his support for the bill. On May 13, Duncan addressed a letter to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid indicating that the bill was necessary in order to prevent “millions” of school children from suffering and that the act of denying the request would “undermine the groundbreaking reform efforts underway in states and districts all across the country.”

Really? More than federal interference in public education already has?

Since 1970, the average spending per student by the Department of Education has nearly doubled,



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while SAT scores have dropped. Science, Math, and Reading scores continue to decline, with U.S. students scoring lower in Math than any other country, with the exception of Spain, according to the National Center for Home Education. Clearly, an increase in educational spending has done little to improve education.

Republican Representative Thaddeus McCotter explains that Duncan's proposed measure indicates "the failure of the stimulus." He adds that his state of Michigan has a staggering "14 percent unemployment; nationally, we're looking at 9.9 percent. We've seen a spike in jobless claims — all of which was supposed to have been prevented by the trillion dollars this administration already spent to 'create or save' jobs." Republicans have opposed the bill citing previous federal expenditures for education, the \$12 trillion deficit, and the fact that the bill does not account for cuts in spending to help fray the cost.

Lindsey Burke, education analyst at the Heritage Foundation, notes that approximately one-third of the stimulus money received by the Department of Education remains untouched. Burke takes the common sense approach when she remarks, "More federal funding is not going to solve states' fiscal problems and could in fact exacerbate those problems, by really preventing states from making the difficult budgetary decisions necessary to reduce costs and effect long-term systemic education reform."

She notes that the problems plaguing public education are a result of an increase in the number of non-teaching positions, which are straining state budgets. In fact, half of those employed in the public education sector are non-teachers, even while class sizes are decreasing to an average of 15 students for every one teacher.

The editorial board of the *Washington Post* took a stance against the measure indicating that the stimulus bill created yet further entitlement mentalities among educators, "an unfortunate expectation of yet more federal dollars to bail out the states."

One solution to the fiscal woes of public education that is often greeted with malice is to eliminate the Department of Education, which is only 31 years old. Hundreds of billions of dollars have been poured into the Department of Education, only to show no progress whatsoever in test scores. Originally intended to help Title I schools, the Department of Education allocates more money to the richest counties than to the poorer states and districts, in contrast to the original intent of the Department, according to Chris Edwards of the CATO Institute. The Home School Legal Defense Association explains that not only is the federal role in education a violation of the Tenth Amendment, it has resulted in an increase in the education spending rate by three times the original amount, has usurped states' educational authority, created unnecessary red tape for school districts to function properly, and resulted in the creation of 760 unconstitutional federal education programs costing a total of \$120 billion for those programs alone.

If both bills are passed, the federal government will issue a total of \$188 billion in union bailouts. The irony of the situation in which Americans may find themselves is that they will be responsible for shouldering the financial burdens of people who are far better off fiscally than the American taxpayers. The AFL-CIO reports that "union members earn 26 percent more than their nonunion counterparts, more than 75 percent of union workers have health benefits, as opposed to the less than half of nonunion members, and 70 percent of union workers have a pension, unlike the 14 percent of nonunion workers".

As indicated by Blakeman, these bailout packages are simply a way to insure votes from union workers in the upcoming elections, but it is hard to believe that union workers would ever vote against the



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Democratic Party, whether the bailout packages are approved or not. Steve Smith of the California labor Federation has already pledged, "We are going to devote more resources to the 2010 campaign than we have ever done in any prior campaign." Hopefully, the Tea Partiers are prepared.

Photo: Democratic Senate candidate Bob Casey meets with supporters at the Teamsters Union Hall Local 429 in Wyomissing, Pa., Oct. 30, 2006: AP Images



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