



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on March 21, 2011

## New Jersey Gov. Forces Public Unions to Propose Concessions

NJ.com [explains](#):

The Communications Workers of America, which represents about 40,000 state workers, detailed a plan union leaders say would increase employees' share of insurance premiums to about 14 percent and save taxpayers more than \$200 million by 2013. The plan calls for increased monthly contributions and higher co-pays for doctor's visits and prescription drugs.



Union leaders confessed that they felt compelled to make the concessions after New Jersey Governor Chris Christie made clear that he was disinterested in negotiating medical benefits. On March 16, Christie announced at a press conference that he wanted union workers to pay as much as 30 percent of their health insurance premiums, adding that the details of negotiating medical benefits should be handled through legislation.

Along with New Jersey Democratic Senate President Stephen Sweeney, Christie contends that "broad-based legislation" is the best way to save the state millions of dollars and ensure that both public and private unions are treated equally.

"We're changing New Jersey, and the CWA has to be part of it," said Christie in an appearance in Newark, New Jersey. "I know they don't like the fact that someone will go to the Legislature and fight for the taxpayers rather than fleece the taxpayers, which they've been doing over history. Sorry, there's a new game in town and they're going to have to get used to it."

Bob Master, CWA political director, retorted: "Governor Christie professes to love collective bargaining, but we have yet to see it. What's going on in New Jersey is no different than what's going on in Wisconsin and Ohio."

CWA state director Hetty Rosenstein asserted that while state workers agree that they should contribute more to their benefits, negotiations should take place, as has been done in the past. She reported that she wants to reach out to other public unions in order to stage a "mass negotiation" that would help Christie achieve the savings he has promised while preserving collective bargaining rights for union workers.

According to Christie, the health benefits law that would affect all 510,000 state public workers would



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save the Garden State \$300 million in the proposed budget.

CWA has proposed a plan of its own. NJ.com writes:

Under the CWA plan, workers would continue to pay 1.5 percent of their salaries toward medical costs but would also kick in an additional 5 percent of their premiums by 2013. The hybrid model is designed to take into account a worker's salary.

By the end of the contract, average workers would pay about 13.5 percent of their medical premium costs, about \$210 a month for family coverage. Rosenstein said with co-pays and other changes, workers would pay about 22 percent of their premiums.

That figure does not meet Christie's approval, however, as he has set his sights on 30 percent — approximately \$475 a month — for family coverage. Similarly, Sweeney has announced that he wants workers to pay 12 to 30 percent of premiums, based on salary.

States such as Wisconsin and Ohio have sought [legislation](#) to limit the collective bargaining privileges of government workers in the state, while Tennessee has specifically [targeted](#) the collective bargaining ability of teachers' unions. Ohio's legislation even establishes penalties for public-sector employees who participate in illegal strikes.

Even progressivist Franklin D. Roosevelt [recognized](#) that limitations should be applied to public unions, having observed:

All Government employees should realize that the process of collective bargaining, as usually understood, cannot be transplanted into the public service. It has its distinct and insurmountable limitations when applied to public personnel management.

The very nature and purposes of Government make it impossible for administrative officials to represent fully or to bind the employer in mutual discussions with Government employee organizations.

Particularly, I want to emphasize my conviction that militant tactics have no place in the functions of any organization of Government employees.

A strike of public employees manifests nothing less than an intent on their part to prevent or obstruct the operations of Government until their demands are satisfied. Such action, looking toward the paralysis of Government by those who have sworn to support it, is unthinkable and intolerable.

The election of bold leaders such as Governor Scott Walker of Wisconsin and Governor Chris Christie of New Jersey — both of whom have proven unafraid to take on the unions — indicates the public's growing inclination toward fiscal conservatism and increased recognition that the current system of unfunded liabilities is impossible to sustain.

Photo of Chris Christie: AP Images



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