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## John Coupal: For state workers, April 15 is Christmas



By JON COUPAL  
President, Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association  
[Howard.Jarvis.Taxpayers.Association@freedom.com](mailto:Howard.Jarvis.Taxpayers.Association@freedom.com)

### Story Highlights

With lawmakers they elected protecting them, government unions thrive.

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ARTICLE

Government employees have been described, for very good reasons, as America's protected class. For the most part, they are immune from the same competitive pressures that face people employed in the private sector. While many of the rest of us worry about hanging on to jobs, public employee union members complain when they don't get a hefty increase in salary and benefits every year. Their excessive pensions, as just reported by the [Sacramento Bee](#), have put [California](#) in a state of functional bankruptcy.

For this "protected class," Tax Day, April 15, is the biggest holiday of the year. How important is it to them? Think of a 5-year-old on Christmas morning, surveying the largesse bestowed by Santa Claus. After all, the middle of April for most taxpayers marks the deadline to deliver their contribution to the truckloads of cash that Californians send to Sacramento every year.



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Although taxes are up, increasing the burden on nearly overwhelmed taxpayers, state revenue is down – yes, the two are directly connected – and services will have to be cut. Still, public employees soldier bravely on, knowing they are the highest-paid state workers in the nation.

**Recession?** What recession? While private sector unemployment in California is at 12.5 percent – and that percentage does not count people who have given up looking – employment for government employees is at 100 percent. Thanks to their sponsors in the Legislature, state employees continue to be largely shielded from the consequences of the worst economy in 75 years.

So how is it that, while families are threatened with losing everything, employees in government continue to prosper? It is the power of the public employee unions who are responsible for electing the majority in the Legislature through their deep war chests and ability to turn out volunteers to elect their candidates. This is why, at both the state and local level, when the unions sit down to negotiate new contracts, they are faced on the other side of the bargaining table by representatives they are responsible for electing.

Lest one believe that this is simply mere unfounded union bashing, a recent study demonstrates a direct correlation between a state's debt level and its degree of public sector unionism. The [Cato Institute](#), after collecting and analyzing the data, concluded that "the states with the highest per-capita debt also happen to be the states with the largest government union workforces."

Obviously, public sector compensation, especially benefits, will be one of the most pressing challenges faced by our next governor. And irony of ironies, it was one of the major candidates, Democrat [Jerry Brown](#), who, in his previous incarnation as governor (1975-83) signed the law that empowered the public employee unions with the collective bargaining rights that have, over 30 plus years, made these unions the most powerful political entities in state.

So, as taxpayers mail off their annual contribution to the welfare fund for public employees, they should be thinking about which gubernatorial candidate has the backbone to

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stand up to the government employee unions. By making the right choice, taxpayers may actually find themselves with something to celebrate for a change.

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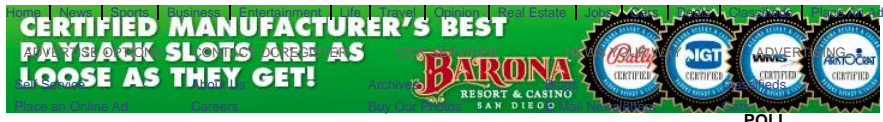
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