

Leon Panetta, Master Negotiator

by Ivan Osorio on April 6, 2012

Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta has admitted to racking up over \$800,000 in government travel costs for weekend trips back to his home in California. [The Washington Times](#) reports that, “Before accepting the job as defense secretary, Mr. Panetta negotiated his right to commute home to California nearly every weekend using a military equivalent of a Gulfstream jet, as his job as Pentagon chief requires him to do.”

As the Cato Institute’s David Boaz notes, “‘Negotiated’ with whom? Not the taxpayers. Maybe this is actually a good deal, all things considered, to get the right Secretary of Defense. But we do know that the people who negotiated weren’t spending their own money.”

Indeed, this is reminiscent of the ongoing cozy arrangement between public sector unions and the politicians they help elect. By devoting [so many resources to electoral politics](#), government employee unions create an incentive for elected officials to advance the unions’ agenda. Thus, in states that allow public sector collective bargaining, union interests are represented on both sides of the table.

For union-friendly elected officials, the benefits from concentrated union support far outweigh any downside from unorganized taxpayer discontent — until their jurisdictions go broke. That is now finally happening. Across the nation, state and local governments have seen their finances go south since the onset of financial crisis in 2008, forcing many of them to [address unfunded liabilities](#) they face as a result of generous union contracts that go back years.

Now if there were some way to scale back federal officials’ lavish perks.

For more on public sector unions, see [here](#) and [here](#).