



Letters to the editor

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

01:00 AM EST on Tuesday, December 29, 2009

Conflating unions

Your editorial headlined “And the winners are . . .” that ran back on Sept. 15 about federal compensation contained a gross inaccuracy about federal unions. They do not name their own price for labor. Pay is not a negotiable issue, although hours of work and working conditions are negotiable. Although I was not in a bargaining unit for the last several years of my career, I was previously an American Federation of Government Employees member and served as a shop steward many years ago. Your editorial confused federal unions with private-sector unions.

The Cato Institute’s comparison of federal pay to private-sector pay is flawed at the outset. There are few blue-collar workers in the federal workforce, while the private sector has millions of blue-collar employees. Comparing the compensation of a private-sector store employee to a Border Patrol agent (a much more dangerous job) is pointless. If you want to compare the compensation of a Border Patrol agent to a police officer, you have occupations that are specifically comparable. The Cato Institute relied on federal data that cover all employees. Government employees are almost all specialists with specialized training.

As a recently retired federal employee with four years of military service and almost 32 years of federal civilian service, I agree that our jobs are secure and that we are well paid. I have many friends in Rhode Island who work for the federal government, state government and local government. In my experience, federal pay is better than state and local, but the state and local employees have better and cheaper health care and can retire at an earlier age.

Steve Higgins Greenville

Senate bribery rackets

In his Dec. 22 letter, “Where was our extortion?” Henry Kates expressed disappointment that Rhode Island senators did not obtain a favor for the Ocean State in exchange for their votes for the health-care bill. After all, for their yes votes, Sen. Mary Landreau wrangled \$300 million for Louisiana and Sen. Ben Nelson held out for relieving Nebraska from all further funding of Medicaid increases.

Of course, the pay for Louisiana and Nebraska’s favors will be extracted from the taxpayers of the other 48 states. Whether or not we taxpayers approve of the health-care bill, all Americans should demand higher ethical standards from their senators. While our Rhode Island senators did not offer their vote in exchange for a special benefit to Rhode Island, they should have shown ethical courage by voting in opposition to such dishonest dealings of Senate leaders and publicly exposing their colleagues who participated.

Have we Americans come to accept unethical behavior of our elected officials intended to change a nay vote to a yea vote for a benefit received by some at the expense of all others? Apparently Mr. Kates does.

William H. Clay West Greenwich

A bar to heaven?

I have read the stories about the Catholic Church and Rep. [Patrick Kennedy](#) with interest. I would like to point out that receiving Communion is only a small part of the problem. The main question is: Will people who believe in abortion go to heaven?

Paul Agrosti Rumford

Masterful warning

The Dec. 23 letter by Fred Comelia, “Americans far more frustrated than Obama,” is a near masterpiece.

His short list of frustrations — “throw away taxpayer money . . . destroy the greatest health system on the planet” — shows that there is still somebody out there who has a very good grasp on what is happening to this country while in the hands of Barack Obama and his administration.

The final result of Washington’s so-called leadership will devastate our country if it is allowed to continue beyond the 2010 national elections. But by then it might already be too late.

Lewis A. Prescott Lincoln

Watery silliness

Brown University is to be commended for its commitment to doing away with the always-within-reach, non-reusable, individual water bottle (“Bottled water ban on tap,” news, Dec. 22). Apparently the students, faculty and staff at Brown go through an astounding 250,000 of these each year.

Those who are addressing this problem should be aware that healthy humans, unless they are in a very hot place, or engaged in heavy physical activity, can generally get by perfectly well on as little as two or three quarts of water over 24 hours. Taking more water more frequently than three or four times a day is purely discretionary. So one should be able to get through a strenuous afternoon of classes without touching a drink. For the truly parched, a few sips from a drinking fountain — I assume these still exist on campus — should suffice.

It is a testimony to the advertising skills of the bottled-water industry, and to the human herd instinct that people in First World countries are seldom seen without a bottle of water at the ready. Just do without. You’ll survive.

David Maude, M.D. Pawtucket