



Spreading the pain, finally

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The news Saturday that the Hesperia Unified School District is contemplating layoffs is not exactly a surprise.

Times are tough all over. Great swaths of the private sector work force have already been decimated by the economy's crash over the past two years, with California being especially hard hit among the states. While the jobless picture nationally improved a tad to 9.7 percent unemployed, according to the figures from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (and it remains at more than 12 percent in California), that number is still a far cry from the 4 percent unemployment rate just three short years ago.

But notice, please; HUSD's decision to cut its work force came about two years after those who work in the private sector began taking their lumps.

So does that mean teachers are more important than, say, mechanics? Not if you need your car fixed, they're not. How about congressional staffers? Are they more important than builders? They are, apparently, to members of Congress loathe to inflict budget reality on themselves and their employees. (As an aside, we'd be willing to bet the farm that not a single member of Congress has reduced staff to reflect the economy's downturn.)

It's the new system

But that's the system we now live under. Over on the Op-Ed page today, Steven Greenhut explains just how unbalanced the system is between the public and private sector, and how much unions affect that imbalance.

And, of course, even in the private sector, unions have rigged the game at the expense of the non-unionized work force. Consider, for instance, the bailouts of General Motors and Chrysler. Those bailouts had nothing to do with any urge on Barack Obama's part to save the companies. His only consideration was pumping tax money into them to save union pensions and union jobs, a big part of his constituency.

Naturally, public sector unions (teachers included) are fighting tooth and nail to stave off any job cuts. As the Daily Press story Saturday noted, "(R)epresentatives from all stakeholder groups — the Hesperia Teachers Association, California School Employees Association and district management — are meeting with school district officials to work out the best deals possible for their constituents."

Guess who's left out

Anyone notice which “stakeholders” aren’t being represented here? Yes, indeed — taxpayers. All they do is pay the bills, and there are fewer and fewer of them to support more and more public sector workers at higher and higher pay and benefit packages.

Chris Edwards, the Cato Institute’s director of tax policy studies, wrote last August that in 2000, the average federal civilian compensation was \$76,187, while private sector employees earned \$45,772. Eight years later, private sector salaries had risen to an average \$59,909, but recession-proof federal workers’ average annual compensation was an astonishing \$119,982.

One day, we assume, the financial burden borne by the private sector — which in the final analysis pays all the bills — will grow so great it will provoke a mass revolt. Signs of that revolt are already appearing as the Tea Party movement gains strength and members.

The Obama administration keeps trying to limit the outrage by claiming it’s raising taxes “only on the rich,” so as not to stir resentment among potential new Tea Party members. But that can only last so long; Mr. Obama’s definition of “rich” keeps changing so as to include more and more of those taxpayers who represent the middle class.

Meanwhile, we’d like to think the HUSD layoffs portend a tightening of belts in the public sector similar to what’s going on in the private sector. We’d like to think so ... but we don’t.

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