

July 15, 2002

## TEACHERS UNION SELLING OUT ITS MEMBERS IN CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT DRIVE

BY GARY LANDRY

**The union bureaucracy sees this amendment as a means of gaining new dues-paying members.**

The constitutional amendment to reduce class size is receiving a great deal of support from the state teachers union. I believe the union bureaucracy is trying to capitalize on a feel-good measure that would come at the expense of the 150,000 teachers it purports to represent.

Here's why—it's simple math. The current state budget is about \$50 billion. Total K-20 education takes about \$20 billion of all state spending. The other \$30 billion is used for other vital state services such as health care, roads, prisons, and so on, with most of this funded through dedicated budgets such as trust funds that restrict use of these funds for other programs. The Revenue Estimating Conference Committee which, by law, must compute a price tag for all constitutional initiatives, recently concluded that this one class-size initiative would require the state to add an additional \$20.5 and \$27 billion, over eight years, to its current education budget to get the program up and running.

Refer back to the simple math problem. If we add \$27 billion, over eight years, to the \$20 billion already going to education, funds for other programs, including education programs, would have to be used to pay for this unproven experiment. Is the state ready to shut the doors to health agencies? Are we ready to shut down prisons and let criminals run free? Would we want to halt new road construction or reduce environmental protections? Insert your favorite state program here and ask yourself, "Am I ready to shut it down or reduce spending to the point of reducing the effectiveness of existing programs?"

Obviously, the answer is a resounding no. But why is the teachers union supporting such an expensive measure? Greed. It saves the union bureaucracy's status quo. With union membership continuously falling, union leaders need more dues-paying members to continue funding the extravagant lifestyle created for themselves and a select few staffers. The lifestyle I refer to are extravagant salaries and benefits of local presi-

dents, which can currently exceed \$235,000, some of whom get to live in million dollar homes owned by the union itself. Dozens of staffers are paid in excess of \$100,000 a year and have life, health, and vision insurance fully paid for them and their families with union dues. It's imperative to point out that while union leaders receive these financial perks, the average teacher earns about \$35,000 a year and most school districts require them to pay at least some portion of their health insurance. They also have to pay up to \$831 in union dues if they join the union.

The union bureaucracy sees this amendment as a means of gaining new dues-paying members. Even if only a small percentage of the thousands of additional teachers that school districts would have to hire joined, that would be seen as positive cash flow for the union bureaucracy. And that, is why the teachers union is pushing this initiative.

The union won't tell rank-and-file teacher members that they can forget about any pay raises for the foreseeable future. That fact is in the math problem listed above. Virtually all new monies and many existing program funds would go to education to maintain the status quo. The only difference would be that there would be more of the status quo; more classrooms, more teachers, more school buildings. There would be no money to improve existing programs or salaries. It's the big problem I have with the entrenched teachers union: they frequently tell half-truths. The union is leading its members to believe that if there is more money in the education budget, salaries will improve. Simple math reveals the union bureaucracy is willing to sell the souls of its members so that it does not have to give up the elite lifestyle it has created for select union leaders.

###

*Gary Landry is a policy analyst at The James Madison Institute and may be contacted via email at [glandry@jamesmadison.org](mailto:glandry@jamesmadison.org)*