



News Release

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JMI STUDY CRITICIZES PUBLIC EMPLOYEES' COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

TALLAHASSEE - Florida's public employees and the unions that bargain for them may be eroding state and local governments' ability to provide basic services in an efficient manner, according to a new study by The James Madison Institute.

In *Public Employee Collective Bargaining: The Florida Experience*, JMI adjunct scholar Robert "Jake" Bebber asks this question: Is a civil service system compatible with unionism and its assertion that public employees have a "right" to collectively bargain?

Bebber writes, "Collective bargaining by public employees presents several contradictions" with a civil service system. "Public employees become lobbyists and activists, defeating the civil service system's original goal of replacing the highly politicized 'spoils system' with a new class of non-partisan, non-political, and highly professional class of government employees. The civil service system was designed to prevent political coercion, yet unionism compels political activism."

A "right" to collective bargaining by public employees and the "special status" it provides has meant fraud and abuse with taxpayer dollars. Bebber points out how generous disability pension programs raised eyebrows with investigative reporters in the Tampa area who discovered that "1 in every 3 police officers and firefighters retires on a disability pension."

Bebber concludes, however, that the impetus toward bargaining could be slowed by improving wages and benefits for high performing public employees. "Nothing prevents a local school board in Florida from paying its best teachers \$100,000 a year if it so chose -- except for the fact that such an arrangement would likely require a significant 'pay for performance' arrangement - i.e. 'merit pay' - a concept that has been consistently rejected by local union bosses."

According to JMI Policy Director Robert Sanchez, "The collective bargaining approach has not been the solution that its proponents had hoped. Pitting employees against managers in an adversarial relationship while they're also operating within a civil service system undermines the efficient use of taxpayer dollars."

The study's author, Robert "Jake" Bebber, is available for interview by phone. For scheduling or to request a printed copy of *Public Employee Collective Bargaining: The Florida Experience*, contact Matt Warner at (850) 383-4633 (toll free 1-866-340-3131) or matt@jamesmadison.org. For an electronic version, visit www.jamesmadison.org.

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