

1/4/13

## **Public employees aren't the enemy**

### **To the Editor:**

The response by the usual conservative ideologues to a recently released study comparing public sector and private sector salaries is predictable and off-base to say the least. The idea that the data from this study should be interpreted to mean Rhode Island's problems can be solved by piling on public employees is nothing more than ridiculous right wing propaganda. I would expect nothing less from the likes of GoLocalProv.com writer Travis Rowley, who dedicated his Saturday, Dec. 1 column to the issue.

In his response to the study, it is more than curious that Mr. Rowley conveniently leaves out the paragraph in the Providence Journal article highlighting the information where Mike Stenhouse, the director of the group responsible for the study, makes the point the numbers do not necessarily indicate overpaid public employees but perhaps underpaid private sector employees here in Rhode Island, due to a struggling economy.

The irony that a staunch conservative the likes of Travis Rowley who repeatedly lobs accusations of class warfare at democrats would openly advocate for any citizen of our state to receive pay cuts is glaring, and only serves to further discredit his soundly rejected views. Months after conservatives in our state took yet another beating at the ballot box, and the citizens of our state once again rejected the "scorched earth" policies of the right, Mr. Rowley continues to push his anti-worker agenda to a populace who clearly reject it. Contained in all of the literature, talking points and propaganda is one common theme: attacks on working men and women, specifically public employees. For the handful of men and women in Mr. Rowley's camp, occasionally hidden under the surface, but most times right out in the open, is a deeply seeded disdain for working men and women. Public and private sector, blue collar and white collar, union and non-union, we are all workers and taxpaying citizens of Rhode Island. The divide and conquer agenda that has been so soundly rejected time and time again will not bring our state back to prosperity. Pitting one worker against another is counterproductive and simply a distraction from the task of getting Rhode Islander's back to work.

Over the last several decades, the labor movement has taken the lead in working with private enterprise and state government on training programs, educational opportunities for workers, helping to support legislation leading to job creation, and worked tirelessly to protect good and decent working conditions for Rhode Island's workforce. While Mr. Rowley spends his energy trying to tear down and erase Rhode Island's strong working class roots, the labor movement has continued to roll up our sleeves and work with our state leaders to get R.I. back on track.

What conservatives with an anti-public employee agenda fail to understand is a Rhode Island worker is a Rhode Island worker. In the labor movement, we are committed to see all workers earning decent wages, receiving good, fair health care, and being given the dignity of a secure retirement. Our message is clear: together, working men and women built this great state, and together and only working together we will rebuild our economy. What will not help in our collective effort are radical conservatives attempting to shoehorn an agenda of disdain for public employees into the equation. I reject the notion that the solution for Rhode Island is to bring every worker down to the lowest common denominator when it comes to pay, health care and retirement security. I reject the notion the working class must continue to be squeezed so the most fortunate among us can continue to enjoy unprecedented wealth accumulation. The only way forward for Rhode Island is to reach out and pull our working families up, up to a job with a decent wage, up to a job with respectable and affordable health care, and up to a job that comes with retirement security.

What conservatives like Mr. Rowley need for their vision is an enemy to attack and attempt to destroy for the "good of the entire state." It is clear public employees are the chosen enemy and in this world there can be no progress in R.I. unless it comes with a heavy blow to the tens of thousands of hard working public employees and teachers throughout R.I. Luckily for all Rhode Islanders, this vision has been soundly rejected time and time again.

We are your neighbors, your friends and your family. We are taxpayers, we are members of the community and we care deeply about our state. We are proud to be a part of the Rhode Island workforce, and we are committed to working towards good jobs for all working men and women throughout Rhode Island.

Blue collar and white collar, public sector and private sector, union and non-union, we are all Rhode Island workers and no amount of propaganda in print, on the radio or any other medium can change that. It is the resolve, determination and cooperation between all parties that will see us through this difficult economic time and move R.I. forward.

I close with a quote from President John F. Kennedy from a speech given in August of 1960 discussing the role of labor in America and the importance of workers having a voice in the work place:  
"Our labor unions are not narrow, self-seeking groups. They have raised wages, shortened hours and provided supplemental benefits. Through collective bargaining and grievance procedures, they have brought justice and democracy to the shop floor."

**Mike McDonald**  
**President Local 528**  
**West Kingston**

---