

Contributors

Downey and Grilli: Governor isn't credible on state staffing

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IN RESPONSE to Rhode Island Director of Administration Beverly Najarian's May 10 column, "More state workers is not the answer," we offer a point-by-point rebuttal to set the record straight. With regard to the use of temporary employees throughout Rhode Island state government, we respectfully suggest that Director Najarian is being less than candid with the public. In her op-ed, Ms. Najarian makes the disingenuous claim that union leadership "is against the current system and against reforming it." Four basic points will illustrate why Ms. Najarian's argument is insincere and hypocritical.

The creation of limited-service positions is unnecessary: The Carcieri administration has continuously proposed creating limited-service positions. These positions would offer workers no benefits other than workers' compensation and workers would not be eligible for collective bargaining. Council 94 strongly opposes the creation of these limited-service positions for one very basic reason. According to our contract, which was signed by both the governor and Ms. Najarian, "Article 48 Temporary Services" lets the state create temporary, "at-will" employees. They would be appointed for six months and renewed for additional six-month periods. And while they would not receive any benefits, they would pay union dues and accrue seniority – allowing them to bid on full-time positions. There is absolutely no legitimate reason for the General Assembly to create an inferior type of employee through statute — unless it wants to create a personal playground of plum patronage positions.

Governor Carcieri and Director Najarian have opposed transparency: Governor Donald Carcieri vetoed the "Government Oversight and Fiscal Accountability" review act three times. The law, which went into effect last year notwithstanding the governor's veto, requires state agencies to supply an addendum to their budget requests each year. The budgetary addendum must list all privatization contracts over \$100,000; the name of the vendor; the services provided; the costs of the contract for the last, current and next fiscal year; the employees' job titles; the number of positions; and the average hourly wage rate. These addendums would present the same information currently available for all state employees through the personnel supplement. Despite asking for only basic information, Council 94 and The Journal's requests for the addendums have been refused by the Carcieri administration. Its argument is that it does not have to produce public records that do not exist. We contend that since it does not have the budgetary addendums — and the budget was submitted in February — Governor Carcieri and Director Najarian are breaking the law. Maybe a state police investigation is in order?

What does Governor Carcieri have to hide? With the announcement of the \$102,858-a-year clerk-typist at the Department of Transportation, one has to wonder what other boondoggles exist within state government? Over the past four years, we have informed the Carcieri administration time and again that its over-reliance on temporary employees is harmful to the delivery of effective state services. Additionally, many of these so-called “temporary” employees end up working for years in state government positions. We respectfully suggest that Governor Carcieri’s current attempt at instituting a review of these contracts is simply a hollow scheme to prevent the General Assembly from conducting its constitutional duties of oversight. Ironically, as a campaign sound bite, the governor continuously talked about how much money he saved through his Big Audit. If it was so effective, why did he miss this blatant abuse of government? And what else does he have to hide? It appears, unfortunately, that the Big Audit missed the Big Bucks Contracts.

Najarian and Carcieri’s defense of state employees is hypocritical: After using his bully pulpit for four years to chastise hard-working career state employees, hearing the governor and Ms. Najarian claim to defend state employees is downright laughable. The governor claims that the information being requested by the Senate Government Oversight Committee is overwhelming workers and threatening the efficiency of state government. Council 94 represents over 500 employees at the Department of Administration. To date, we have not received a single complaint with regard to the records request.

Had Ms. Najarian and the Carcieri administration done their jobs effectively in the first place, this issue never would have surfaced. It is only because of the administration’s incompetence that problems like Smart Staffing and \$102,858-a-year typists even exist. For Ms. Najarian to shift the blame to public employees and unions is utterly incomprehensible.

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