



MANHATTAN INSTITUTE FOR POLICY RESEARCH

## Press Release

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# FIRST EVER NATIONAL POLL REVEALS WIDESPREAD BIPARTISAN SUPPORT FOR REFORMS TO PUBLIC SECTOR UNION BENEFITS AND COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

**New York, NY:** States continue to grapple with the three-year fiscal crisis that has involved intense battles over everything from public employee pensions and benefits to collective bargaining. On September 20, 2011, at a conference headlined by Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker and Indiana Gov. Mitch Daniels, the Manhattan Institute presented the first comprehensive national poll on voter attitudes on public sector unions and state budgets conducted by pollster Douglas E. Schoen. The results show widespread bipartisan support for reforms that will pare back spending and not increase taxes.

State and local leaders should know that voters on both side of the aisle support the reduction of certain benefits and the reform of pension systems for current and future public employees to help resolve state fiscal problems. Voters strongly oppose measures to increases taxes in order to balance state budgets.

“These polling results demonstrate significant voter support for reforming the terms of public sector employment. It’s clear that voters want to hold the lines of taxes and are demanding more realistic compensation systems for public employees,” said Manhattan Institute president Lawrence J. Mone.

The results paint a vivid picture of how both Democrats and Republicans can move forward on legislation and the restructuring of union contracts as they battle shrinking revenues in their states.

Poll results show:

**Voters know that there is a big fiscal problem – 66 percent to 23 percent believe that their state’s economy is headed in the wrong direction and 78 percent say that their state faced a budget crisis this year. In order to solve these crises, voters strongly support policies that cut state spending and reduce benefits for current and future public employees, but not for retirees. Voters also believe that employees should contribute more towards their pensions. Voters strongly resist any tax increases.**

- A plurality of voters, 47 percent, say that cutting state government spending is the best way to address the problem of states not being able to afford public employee benefits.
- A decisive 60 percent of voters say that current public employees should have to contribute more toward their pension benefits because of budget problems and a similarly decisive 57 percent of voters say that new public employees should have to contribute toward paying for their health care benefits because of state and local government budget problems.
- However, by a margin of 69 percent in favor to 25 percent in opposition, voters say that retirees should not have to contribute more towards their pension and health care benefits because of budget problems.

**Voters also believe that the basis of the entire public employee pension system needs to be dramatically reformed.**

- By almost two-to-one, voters favor giving current public employees a choice between participating in a defined contribution plan or a defined benefit plan.
- Voters also strongly favor, 69 percent to 17 percent, moving all new public employees from a defined benefit plan to a defined contribution plan.

**Voters acknowledge that the influence of unions needs to be curtailed in order for these reforms to occur. Voters feel there is no absolute right to collective bargaining; rather, it is a benefit that can and should be negotiated. Voters are prepared to accept some restrictions on collective bargaining when states are facing fiscal problems. There is also evidence that voters view some of the outcomes from the collective bargaining process as counter-productive to a well-functioning public service, as demonstrated by the fact that voters see teacher tenure as a hindrance to improving public education.**

- By 60 percent to 33 percent, voters say that collective bargaining is not a basic right; rather, it is one that can be negotiated. Voters favor restricting some of the collective bargaining rules of public employee unions, 53 percent to 41 percent.
- A majority of 54 percent, compared to 36 percent, say public employees benefits have been gained unfairly, as collective bargaining gives unions a monopoly over the government workforce.
- Voters sided with state officials over public employee unions in recent disputes about restricting benefits, 46 percent to 39 percent, saying that public employee benefits should be reduced during times of fiscal hardships.
- A decisive 56 percent of voters favor phasing out tenure for teachers because it protects bad teachers from being fired while making it harder to bring in new and better teachers, clear evidence that the outcomes of the collective bargaining process are often not in line with creating more responsive government.

**There is, however, a disconnect between the need for reform and state budget crises, as voters do not see a clear linkage between restricting collective bargaining and resolving states' fiscal problems. Different messaging will propel these reforms in the future by calling attention to the enormous power that unions currently wield to block reform.**

- Voters side with state officials in state government disputes over restricting collective bargaining; however, by a margin of 56 percent to 33 percent, they are not convinced that limiting these rights will actually save states money.

[Read the analysis of the poll results](#) by Douglas E. Schoen in the *Wall Street Journal*.

**The national and state poll results from Illinois, Indiana, Florida, Michigan, Montana, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin are available at <http://www.publicsectorinc.org/events/CSLL092011.html>.**

**To schedule an interview with Douglas E. Schoen, please contact Kasia Zabawa at 646-839-3342 or at [kzabawa@manhattan-institute.org](mailto:kzabawa@manhattan-institute.org).**

***Douglas E. Schoen*** has been one of the most influential Democratic campaign consultants for over thirty years. A founding partner and principle strategist for Penn, Schoen & Berland, he is widely recognized as one of the co-inventors of overnight polling. Schoen was named Pollster of the Year in 1996 by the American Association of Political Consultants for his contributions to the President Bill Clinton reelection campaign.

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