

‘Release Time’ Forces Taxpayers to Pay for Union Work

In effect, you’re paying union dues when you pay your taxes

By Trey Kovacs

Summary: Taxpayers expect their government to spend their tax dollars only on activities that benefit the public. Yet across the country, governments at all levels give away tax dollars to the exclusive benefit of government unions—a clear misuse of the public’s money. This subsidy, known as union release time, has flown under the radar for decades, but states are finally starting to do something about it.

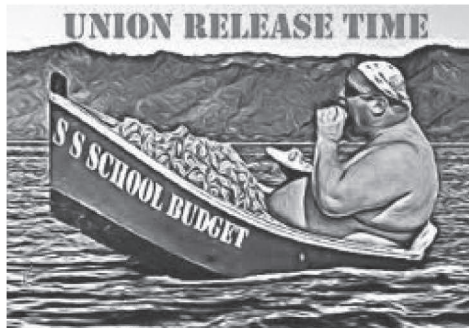
A case argued recently before the U.S. Supreme Court threw a spotlight on one of the worst abuses committed by government-employee unions and their allies: the practice of union officials charging taxpayers for time they spend on union business.

For a moment, it appeared, in *Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association*, that the Supreme Court was prepared to protect the rights of government employees and rein in the power of unions that purport to represent them. On First Amendment grounds, plaintiffs challenged government-employee unions’ practice of taking dues money from members and spending it on political efforts with which those members might disagree.

Justice Antonin Scalia was expected to provide the crucial fifth vote for plaintiffs in the case. After Scalia’s death in February, the vote was tied at 4 to 4, which leaves the lower court’s pro-union/anti-worker ruling in effect.

Unions had prepared for the expected loss by putting money aside. Now that money can be used to get pro-union politicians elected in 2016 and beyond. *In These Times*, a socialist/union publication, reported that “the ‘rainy day’ savings that many unions made in anticipation of an adverse decision can now be used as a ‘Scalia Dividend’ to be invested in new campaigns.”

Friedrichs means that thousands if not millions of public-sector workers must still pay tribute to a union they may disagree with, and for which they likely didn’t even vote



Upper left: A cartoon on the website *The Gray Area* satirized tax-funded ‘release time.’

for. That’s right: Most union members in the public sector never voted to join a union. Unions usually operate by the “one person, one vote, once” rule—that, like control by the ruling party in a one-party dictatorship, unionization is inherited from one generation to the next without new generations having any say in the matter.

In a 2012 paper, Vincent Vernuccio of the Mackinac Center noted the results of such an arrangement:

Since most government unions organized in the 1960s and ’70s, few, if any, of the public employees who voted for those unions are still on the job. In Florida and Michigan, for example, just one percent of teachers in the 10 largest school districts were employed when their union was organized.

In the Ann Arbor, Detroit and Grand Rapids school districts there are likely no current teachers who voted for the unions that operate there, since these

unions were organized in 1965. Further, if the age distribution of teachers in these districts mirrors that of the state as a whole, nearly 75 percent of the teachers working in these districts would not have even been born when the union in their workplace was certified.

Government-employee unions claim the power to represent, in the political process, members who never chose to join—and, worse, they make you pay for it.

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Taxpayer-funded

Teachers, librarians, bus drivers, and other public employees are not the only ones forced to pay for union representation they don't want. Union release time essentially treats taxpayers the same as non-union members who are compelled to pay "agency fees" (effectively, forced union dues).

That happens via the practice of union release time, which allows government employees to conduct union business on the taxpayer's dime. (The practice is usually called "release time" at the state and local level, and "official time" at the federal level.)

Yes, all over the country, taxpayers foot the bill for union agents to negotiate contracts, participate in grievance procedures, attend union conventions, and engage in other activities totally unrelated to any public purpose or civic duty.

Paid release time places no obligation on government unions to provide anything in return to the public in exchange for the subsidy. Despite the immense budgetary problems in numerous states and municipalities, collective bargaining agreements include this inappropriate use of tax dollars.

Worse, activities performed on release time by public employees often conflict with taxpayers' interests, and may even force taxpayers to fund political activity they oppose. For example, public employees on release time often lobby elected officials to support specific legislation. Public employee unions generally support more government spending, which leads to more government hiring, more potential union members, and more dues money for labor bosses.

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Release time works against the public interest in another way, as shown in a recent Goldwater Institute report. When release time is used to negotiate contracts, "a public employee, being paid public wages, is negotiating for private benefits against another public body. When release time employees use release time to negotiate over wages and benefits, taxpayers are literally funding both sides of the negotiation with no seat at the table themselves."

Fortunately, 47 of 50 states constitutions contain a provision known as the "gift clause," which bans government subsidies that primarily benefit private entities. The Gift Clause can be used to challenge the practice of union release time. Here's an example of such a provision from Article VIII, Section 2 of Idaho's constitution:

The credit of the state shall not, in any manner, be given, or loaned to, or in aid of any individual, association, municipality or corporation; nor shall the state directly or indirectly, become a stockholder in any association or corporation.

Ultimately, activity performed on release time serves the interests of unions. Unions, not taxpayers, should incur those costs. This union subsidy is prevalent across the states. While some state lawmakers may be unaware of the practice, or do not wish to battle powerful government unions to end the subsidy, some effort has been made to undo the wasteful spending.

A look at the situation in selected states:

► Connecticut

As of early 2016, Connecticut was in collective bargaining negotiations with a majority of its state employee unions over pay and work rules. While these negotiations were underway, news broke that the state's projected budget deficit was still increasing, despite efforts to fix it prior to the legislative session.

Fixing such a large budget deficit will take sacrifices from many areas of government. That means Connecticut's legislature should start with the low-hanging fruit. They need to take on union release time expenses, which are considerable in the Nutmeg State.

The Yankee Public Policy Institute and the Competitive Enterprise Institute (CEI) submitted public records requests to shed light on union release time during contract negotiations. As with many examples of government waste, Connecticut's state government does not publicize the cost.

In fiscal year 2015, Connecticut state employers granted state employees 121,517.86 hours of union business leave at a cost of \$4.12 million, according to public records from the Office of Policy and Management. Activity on release time mirrors that of other states—attending conventions, contract administration, collective bargaining negotiations, and union steward training. However, agency officials in Connecticut have complained that the government employees on release time are not necessarily conducting the approved activity which they are permitted to perform.

A 2014 general notice from the state Office of Labor Relations acknowledges concerns from agency personnel on (1) the increased requests for union business leave and (2) the possibility that union representatives may be conducting political activity on union business leave, which is prohibited.

The notice goes on to direct agencies on how to properly record the union subsidy and to explain that state employees on union business leave are prohibited from "membership and holding of office in a political party, organization or club, campaigning for a candidate in a partisan election by making speeches, writing on behalf of the candidate or soliciting votes in support of or in opposition to a candidate and making contributions of time and money to political parties, committees or other agencies engaged in political action." The Office of Labor Relations urges agency personnel to accurately record union business leave and to report activity that is not authorized in collective bargaining agreements.

Connecticut public employers have a golden opportunity to eliminate release time during the current collective bargaining negotiations.

► Texas

Surprisingly, the otherwise reliably conservative Lone Star state grants union release time. And as in many other states, public employers in Texas do not make union release time costs available to taxpayers. To fill this gap, CEI submitted public records requests to municipal agencies in Texas to discover the costs.

The City of Austin records showed the Police Department (APD), Fire Department (AFD) and Emergency Medical Services (AEMS) were granted 10,857 hours of release time in FY 2012 and 16,963 in FY 2013, a cumulative total of 27,821. A total cost figure cannot be calculated because salaries were not provided for all APD, AFD, and AEMS employees. However, for the salaries made

available, the cost of union release time to Austin taxpayers was \$227,530 in FY 2012 and \$593,783 in FY 2013.

The data provided by Austin public employers varied. The APD and AEMS did not indicate the activity performed on release time, while the AFD did. In general, the reason given, in FY 2012 and 2013, fell into a couple of broad categories, including “Union Conference Meeting,” “Grievance Committee,” “Bargaining,” “President” and “other association business.” Union conference meetings and bargaining were the most cited uses of release time.

Some uses of release time are plainly inappropriate. Texas taxpayers pay for union members to party at a “Retirement BBQ” and a “Retirement Party,” go to a “fishing tournament,” and attend a “PAC [Political Action Committee] Meeting.”

Taxpayers’ advocates aren’t the only ones who view release time as waste. The Austin fire union president, Bob Nicks, told Fox News he disagreed with the practice. Instead of fighting fires, Nicks collected a six-figure salary by performing union duties 100 percent of the time. “I’ve been fighting to be put back to work at our fire department,” he said. “The chief wouldn’t allow it. How much they have fought against me was crazy.”

The issue of release time’s legality was presented to Texas Attorney General Mark White in 1979. He was asked to determine whether the Fort Worth Independent School District’s union release time policy, begun in 1975, violated the state constitution’s gift clause, which prohibits public expenditures to private entities that do not serve a public purpose.

The policy gave several teachers’ unions nine days of union release time for every 100 members and allowed the unions to decide what activity could be conducted on release time. During 1978-1979, one union, the Classroom Teachers Association, used 301 release time days at a cost of \$23,000.

Attorney General White determined:

A policy of the Fort Worth Independent School District, which permits teachers to work for professional organizations while being paid salaries by the school district, constitutes an unconditional grant of public funds to a private organization and is therefore unconstitutional.

He noted that Texas’s Gift Clause bans the grant of public funds to private entity “unless

the transfer serves a public purpose and adequate contractual or other controls ensure its realization,” and that release time constituted a “benefit financed from public funds. The policy permits teachers to pursue the business of the professional organization while being paid by the school district.”

White found that the school district failed to articulate how release time served a public purpose and that the release time program failed to place “adequate controls on the use of released time to insure that a public purpose will be served.”

While attorney general opinions do not create law or undo the deleterious impact of current law, they can carry considerable weight with courts as they determine the constitutionality of a given government practice. Government unions are the primary beneficiaries of release time, and they use it to promote their own ends, not public purposes. Texas is ripe for a legal challenge to union release time.

► Virginia

One would assume that union release time doesn’t need investigation in a state like Virginia that prohibits collective bargaining in the public sector. Nevertheless, release time in Virginia is doled out generously. Consider Fairfax County, a suburb of Washington, D.C., that is straining to accommodate high inflows of immigrants. Through public records requests, the Center on National Labor Policy found that the cash-strapped Fairfax County Public Schools—which face a \$70 million budget deficit, according to the *Fairfax County Times*—needed substitutes for the 132,529 hours in which public employees conducted union business over a three-year period. The cost of hiring substitutes for Fairfax County school employees on release time is estimated at \$5.8 million over that three-year period.

The total cost could be much more; incomplete record-keeping makes the actual cost unknown. Even though school district policy requires release time records to be audited, records requests for the total amount of release time from 2012 to the present could not be provided because Fairfax County schools transferred the responsibility for monitoring release time hours to government unions who receive the subsidy—making this a case of the fox guarding the henhouse.

► Missouri

Determining the total time, cost, and activities performed on union release time by Mis-

souri public employers is not easy, because the state’s public employers have pulled every trick in the book to keep the public in the dark. When the Competitive Enterprise Institute attempted to obtain release time data via public records requests, Missouri public employers used multiple tactics to keep the practice under wraps. In addition, a number of government entities simply did not keep release time records. Overall, only a small minority of Missouri government employers could provide even partially satisfactory responses to CEI’s public records requests.

One tactic used by unions’ allies is to charge extremely high fees to obtain release time records. For example, when CEI first inquired, the Missouri Department of Corrections initially claimed union release-time records were closed. Then the agency was told other Missouri government employers had determined release-time records are open under Missouri’s Sunshine Law. At that point, the department conceded and agreed to make the requested records available. But the Deputy General Counsel added responded that the Department of Corrections only recorded release time on handwritten slips and that the estimated cost to fulfill CEI’s request would be \$22,030 and require 1,941 man-hours to complete.

Equally problematic, many other Missouri government employers either inappropriately considered release-time records closed or did not track release time at all. The response from Grandview School District’s Custodian of Records summed up this lack of proper record keeping: Release time records are closed under the state’s Open Records Act, and “the District does not maintain or possess any records responsive to this request. I am not aware of which agency, if any, that maintains records responsive to your request.”

In Kansas City, the Office of the City Manager responded that its legal department decided that records related to a specific employee activity are closed under the Open Records Act. Further, city officials said they do not keep such records and “would not be able to state how many overall hours of union leave has [sic] been granted to employees.”

The City of Springfield records manager said the city could not fulfill CEI’s release time records request because the majority of union activity during work time is governed by *informal* practices throughout the city and is not tracked separately. Nevertheless, the Springfield Records Manager sent CEI a

copy of the formal policy statement regarding release time. The City of Springfield Fire Department “Policies and Procedures” document provides release time for the president and secretary-treasurer of the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) Local 152 to let them attend monthly union meetings and special business meetings. Other employees are allowed to attend union meetings so long as other staff are available to fill in. Union officers may also use release time to attend meetings on grievance procedures and contract negotiations, and other special meetings.

Alarming, the IAFF president and treasurer are able to ignore their public duty so as to attend the union-related meetings even if “manpower is not available on the shift,” in which case “the officer in charge shall either call back someone of equal rank off duty to fill in during the absence, take the vehicle out of service, or make what arrangements are best for the conditions at the time to maintain fire protection coverage and allow the Union Officers to attend their meeting.”

In effect, the City of Springfield Fire Department release time policy allows for the possibility of a vehicle being taken out of service, resulting in a reduction in public safety services, so that union officers can attend a union meeting on the city’s dime.

Few Missouri public employers could provide satisfactory or partial release-time responses. This lack of transparency about the union subsidy should concern citizens who want to know where their tax dollars are going. Still, the information that was supplied reveals what activity is performed on release time in the Show Me State—mainly partisan political activity.

The Parkway School District released the following information:

- During the 2011-2012 school year, the Parkway School District issued the Communication Workers of America (CWA) 20 days of release time at a cost of \$2,489.76. Additionally, the school district paid \$25,602 of the \$87,300.00 annual salary of the Parkway National Education Association (PNEA) president.
- In 2012-2013, the Parkway School District granted 18 days of release time to CWA and PNEA, combined, at a cost of \$4,260.66. During this school year, the Parkway School District paid \$26,126 of the PNEA’s union president’s \$89,100.00 salary.

- In 2013-2014, 23.5 days of release time were granted to CWA and PNEA at a total cost of \$6,115.50. In addition, the Parkway School District paid \$28,026 of the PNEA’s union president’s salary.

While the costs are not huge, the activity performed is an inappropriate use of taxpayer funds. CWA and PNEA members spent most of their release time conducting partisan political activity or attending union meetings and conferences. For example, CWA was allotted 39 days of release time. Of those days, CWA members spent 31 of them participating in “Lobby Day, Jefferson City,” which is an event set up by the CWA and other public-employee unions to lobby legislators. On Lobby Day 2013, the CWA sent 10 members on release time to the state Capitol, where they lobbied legislators to vote against right-to-work and paycheck protection laws—that is, they advocated that legislators limit the freedoms of workers whose interests they supposedly represent.

PNEA political activity on release time involved attending seven days of the National Education Association Capitol Action Day, part of the union’s lobbying efforts. PNEA members on release time also attended the Missouri National Education Association (MNEA) Spring Rep Assembly, an event at which union representatives from around the state discuss internal union business.

The Lindbergh School District provided all requested information. In 2012, employees spent 15 hours on release time at a cost of \$929.68. In 2013, the union was granted 31.34 hours of release time at a cost of \$1,942.21. Lindbergh School District employees on release time also primarily engaged in political activity or attended union meetings including Capitol Action Days-Jefferson City, Missouri State Teachers Association (MSTA) Legislative Day, Regional Assembly for MNEA, Missouri State Teachers Association state convention, MSTA state convention, and MNEA Representative Assembly.

In general, Missouri government employers do not sufficiently track or maintain release time records. Of the reported activity conducted on release time, Missouri public employees primarily engaged in partisan political activity or attended union conferences—undertakings that are completely unrelated to what they were hired to do. Given the poor record-keeping practices that seem to be the norm in Missouri, the hours and cost of release time in Missouri obtained by

CEI’s survey are probably just a small share of the total expended.

► Kentucky

In Kentucky, the City of Louisville and Jefferson County school district routinely funnel hundreds of thousands of citizens’ tax dollars to government employee unions via release time. According to public records requests, from 2011 to 2015, Louisville paid public employees to act as union representatives for 31,458 hours. In 2015 and 2014, release time cost the taxpayers of Louisville \$172,486 and \$126,715, respectively.

Unfortunately, the city either refuses to divulge or does not keep track of the activities its employees perform while on union release time—it did not specify which in its response to open-records request.

While Louisville does not reveal the activity employees partake in on release time, the Jefferson County School District keeps more complete release time data. In Fiscal Year 2013, the district granted the Jefferson County Teachers Association (JCTA) 1,536 hours (192 full work days) at a cost to taxpayers of around \$67,215.

JCTA members spent their release time on various union activities, including participating in JCTA board meetings, as well as organizing committee meetings, union staff interviews, National Education Association conferences, and board meetings of Jobs with Justice, a left-wing group that conducts public campaigns attacking employers. (JwJ is closely tied to the Service Employees International Union, the union most closely associated with President Obama.)

► Pennsylvania

Luckily for taxpayers, some states are seeking to end release time. In Pennsylvania, a two-pronged attack on the union subsidy is underway. The legislature is considering a bill that would curtail the union subsidy in school districts. State Representative Kristin Hill (R-York) introduced House Bill 1649 in 2015-2016 regular session to amend the Public School Code so that full-time union release time is prohibited. A companion bill has been submitted by Senator Pat Stefano (R-Bullskin Township).

In a memorandum attached to the bill, Senator Stefano notes the significant costs and harm that release time causes for Pennsylvania school districts:

In Philadelphia, at least 18 teachers who never set foot in a classroom last year re-

ceived over \$1.7 million from the school district while performing union work during school hours. In Pittsburgh, these employees have received up to \$1.02 million annually. While the union has reimbursed these two districts for much of these costs, it is not legally required to do so. The Commonwealth is still required to make its contributions to cover the pensions of teachers on union leave, and has spent more than \$1 million doing so since 2000. Another concern is that the district has no knowledge or control over what teachers are doing while on this type of leave. The teachers could be working toward goals that the district believes could be harmful to its operation.

Alongside legislation to curb release time, a Pennsylvanian public interest law firm, The Fairness Center, filed a lawsuit against the Allentown School District and the School District of Philadelphia that award union release time.

According to the Fairness Center, the cost of release time to the taxpayers since 2003 is over \$1 million. Plaintiffs in the case are taxpayers Scott Armstrong and Steven Ramos and Public School Employees Retirement System member James Williams. They allege that using tax dollars to pay for the Allentown Education Association's (AEA) president violates the state constitution's Gift Clause.

Since 2009, the current AEA president, Debra Tretter, has exclusively conducted union business and not taught one class. While on this years-long hiatus from teaching, the AEA president continues to receive her teacher's salary, insurance, and benefits and is also allowed to keep her seniority. The lawsuit, filed in February of this year, is still in its preliminary stages.

In 2015, representing Americans for Fair Treatment, the Fairness Center filed a lawsuit against the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers (PFT) and the practice of release time at the School District of Philadelphia. According to the Fairness Center complaint, "up to 63 District employees may perform union work on school time, and most of those employees working for PFT have been out of the classroom for at least 15 years."

Unfortunately, a Commonwealth Court judge ruled the Fairness Center "lacked sufficient facts to support the case." The Fairness Center filed an appeal and oral arguments are scheduled for October 2016.

► Idaho

Another Gift Clause lawsuit has been filed in the Idaho Fourth Judicial District Court against the Boise Independent School District for granting full-time paid release time to the Boise Education Association (BEA) president. Plaintiffs James Auld, a taxpaying resident in the Boise Independent School District, and the Idaho Freedom Foundation, a nonprofit educational research institute, filed a complaint for declaratory and injunctive relief against the practice.

The collective bargaining agreement between the Boise School District and BEA "requires the District to pay [BEA] \$35,932 towards the salary and benefits of the Association president." Still more release time is granted in the District's collective bargaining agreement. Official delegates of the union are provided with paid leave to attend the "Delegate Assembly of the Idaho Education Association" as well as local, state and national union conferences. A summary judgment (that is, a judgment without a full trial) is expected in the lawsuit because the facts are not in dispute.

► Arizona

Release time has been successfully challenged and deemed an unconstitutional public expenditure under Arizona's gift clause, which reads:

Neither the state, nor any county, city, town, municipality, or other subdivision of the state shall ever give or loan its credit in the aid of, or make any donation or grant, by subsidy or otherwise, to any individual, association, or corporation.

In 2011, the Goldwater Institute in Phoenix filed a lawsuit on behalf of taxpayer plaintiffs against the release-time provisions in the contract between the City of Phoenix and the Phoenix Law Enforcement Association (PLEA), which cost taxpayers approximately \$900,000 annually, according to the complaint.

In 2013, a trial was held to examine the constitutionality of union release time in the Maricopa County Court. Judge Katherine Cooper ruled release time unconstitutional. She used a two-part analysis of public expenditures to examine whether release time aided the private interests of government unions and is therefore illegal under the gift clause.

In Arizona, a public expenditure must promote a public purpose, and the public entity must receive proportionate, quantifiable, and

direct benefit for the aid given. The court established that the PLEA uses release time to advance the interests of its members only. Judge Cooper found that release time does not advance a public purpose and "diverts resources away from law enforcement."

She found that the benefits of release time accrue exclusively to police employees and that there is little to no accountability for how union release time is spent. The court held that union release time does not meet either standard for a proper public expenditure under the state's gift clause and is unconstitutional, because the labor contract between PLEA and the City of Phoenix does not require the union to perform any service in return for release time.

In 2015, the Arizona Court of Appeals affirmed the lower court's opinion. In 2016, the Arizona Supreme Court agreed to take on the issue of release time and scheduled oral arguments.

An illegal gift

In sum, release time serves the private interest of unions and is an illegal gift. Today, the demand for government services far exceeds the resources available. Government officials should cut funding for activities that do not advance a public purpose. Yet in the case of union release time, the government pays unions to lobby for higher compensation for their members, and thereby take as many resources from the taxpayers as possible.

Under state Gift Clauses, taxpayers may file suits challenging these unnecessary government expenses. In states with a weak Gift Clause or no Gift Clause, state legislatures may pass legislation to prohibit the practice. Thus, taxpayers have the tools to put an end to the government's practice of giving away the resources of the state to give private benefits to private entities.

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LaborNotes

The **Department of Veterans Affairs** continues to deny services to veterans while it pays hundreds of its employees to work full-time for unions (see *Labor Watch*, Oct. 2014). The **Daily Caller News Foundation** reported in March that the VA declined to discipline supervisors in **Arkansas** for wait-time manipulation—that is, fiddling with records to make it appear that patients' wait time was shorter than it really was. A report by the department's **Inspector General** determined that “both non-supervisory and supervisory [**Veterans Affairs Medical Center**] employees were improperly scheduling patient appointments by manipulating the appointment dates in the VA computer system.” Meanwhile, a review of 40 deceased patients' records in **Phoenix** indicated that three of them likely would have lived if they had received timely treatment. “Phoenix in particular continues to be a source of trouble, whether it's abandoning suicidal veterans, physicians keeping veterans out of open appointment slots or staff breaching the medical record privacy of whistleblowers,” noted the DCNF's **Jonah Bennett**.

In May, **VA Secretary Bob McDonald** downplayed the importance of the long waits, noting to reporters that, “When you go to **Disney**, do they measure the number of hours you wait in line? What's important is, what's your satisfaction with the experience?”

Luke Rosiak of the *Daily Caller* reported on a VA hospital director, **Japhet Rivera**, who, according to **Deputy VA Secretary Sloan Gibson**, retaliated against a whistle-blower who had reported Rivera for doing little work. Also, Rivera allegedly had sex with a VA employee and sent repeated unwanted messages about the matter to the employee's daughter (herself an employee). His punishment: He was *paid* \$86,000, plus attorney's fees and other expenses, in exchange for his resignation. Rosiak also reported that a VA worker “who was fired for bringing a stun gun to work and repeatedly discharging it claims everyone else in her office just watches TV all day, so she doesn't understand why she's being singled out for rare discipline.”

In a related story, **Sarah Westwood** of the *Washington Examiner* reported on a legislative package that was supposed to help clean up the VA, noting that **Sen. Marco Rubio** (R-Fla.) attacked the measure as too weak on employees who abuse veterans. “If you work at the VA and work against the interests of our veterans . . . , the VA secretary should be able to fire you.” But, Rubio said, “the labor unions have so far gotten their way in writing the VA accountability provisions” in the bill.

According to **Nina Rees**, president of the **National Alliance for Public Charter Schools**, **Success Academy** charter schools in **New York** serve students who are “nearly all . . . minorities,” and three-quarters of the students in the program are classified by the government as poor enough to qualify for free or reduced-price lunches. Last year, 93 percent of the schools' students ranked proficient in math, compared to 35 percent of **New York City** students overall. Yet after a group of philanthropists raised \$35 million for Success Academy schools, **Randi Weingarten**, president of the **American Federation of Teachers**, blasted the donation as “part of a coordinated national effort to decimate public schooling” in which “Wealthy donors and their political allies are pushing unaccountable charter growth in urban centers while stripping communities of a voice in their children's education.”

But at least Weingarten's members are trying to help their students—help them cheat, that is. In New York City, teachers have been inflating test scores to help students graduate high school, according to the **National Bureau of Economic Research**. NBER reports that 40 percent of scores near a proficiency cut-off were inflated by teachers, increasing those students' chance of graduating by 22 percentage points.

The **Chicago Teachers Union** (CTU) had a one-day strike on April 1, closing hundreds of schools, but **Joseph Ocol**, a teacher at **Eagle STEM Academy**, refused to participate in the strike—so the union is seeking to expel him and to fine him an amount equal to his pay for the day. (If kicked out, he would still have to pay dues.) Ocol coaches an all-girl chess team that won a national championship. He's said he'll give up the money, but only if it goes to his students, who are trying to raise enough so they can travel to the **White House** for a scheduled meeting with the **President**.

Meanwhile, **CTU President Karen Lewis** has made clear who the real enemy is: **Gov. Bruce Rauner** (R-Ill.), who is pushing for reforms to save his state from bankruptcy. “Rauner is the new **ISIS** recruit,” said Lewis. “Yes, I said it. . . . Because the things he's doing look like acts of terror on poor and working-class people.” She has called **Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel**, former chief of staff to President Obama, the “murder mayor.” Lewis, however, is not the most radical member of the movement in which she is a leader. In April, she keynoted a city-wide protest against Rauner and Emanuel, bringing together a coalition of teachers, transit workers, nurses, “Fight for 15” minimum-wage activists, supporters of **Palestinian Islamofascism**, and various affiliates of the racist, anti-police **Black Lives Matter** movement. During her remarks to the assembled protesters, Lewis responded to anti-police chants by saying, “The cops are not our enemies.” But another speaker declared: “F*** the police!”