

## **Focus on what matters**

The American people are being played against each other in the current dispute about government workers and collective bargaining.

While we argue with each other about whether it is fair for public employees to make as much as those in the private sector, the few at the top who are raking in the lion's share of the wealth stir the pot and distract attention from themselves.

Just a few years ago, first responders were hailed as heroes for their courage on Sept. 11. Teachers were viewed as critical in helping America reclaim its standing as having the best educational system in the world.

Yet now, government employees are viewed as a financial burden. Worse, now we begrudge public workers if any one part of their pay or benefits is better than our own, without looking at their total package, which in most states is lower than the private sector if comparable work and education are factored in.

We should instead be addressing the real issues about our financial distress. For example, investment bankers on Wall Street engaged in risky, unethical and, in some cases, illegal behavior that contributed significantly to the economic downturn, and yet not a single one has gone to jail.

Those at the top argue that low-paid public employees are making too much, yet people who make \$10 million a year get apoplectic when it is proposed that their income tax rate should go up from 36 percent to 39 percent.

Most of the increase in wealth in the past decade has gone to those at the top, while the incomes of those below have been stagnant. So, the rich get richer while everyone else argues over the crumbs.

**There are certainly instances of inequity or abuse in public sector compensation packages. These need to be fixed. But we need to stop fighting among ourselves and stop being distracted from the real issues that need to be addressed.**

We can't sustain our democracy if we allow it to become a plutocracy.

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