

One Governor Candidate's Take on State Unions:

by Mark Stewart Greenstein, July 2018

In Connecticut, many labor unions are like families. Their members look out for one another at work; their members share "watering holes" after work; their families get together on weekends.

Artificial "families" are sentimentally nice. Doing business with them is akin to "buying American": at the margins, I choose to stay "in the family, support America, and support American unionists.

Moral suasion is what union members, and all of Connecticut, will see from me as governor. I know that most unions train their workers well. I know that there is a professional pride in getting good work done, and a professional loyalty to their clients among most unionized craft workers and tradesmen. I know that those who act as "family" back one another up. That's good for clients who employ them.

The state of Connecticut is a client. As a large union employer, the state and its citizens can be big beneficiaries of talented, dedicated unionized workers. That's IF they are talented and dedicated. Connecticut's Governor is a custodian for the financial well-being of 3.6 million citizens. I represent Citizens FIRST. If I can get our Citizens a good deal on the professionals who serve our state, I'm proud. If it can be with home-grown talent, unionized to make them BETTER talent, that's ideal.

With good talent, economically serving our Citizens (call us "clients") you have in me a loudspeaker to CT's unionized state workers AND with me a bullhorn to bring other businesses, other good workers, and other families INTO Connecticut. When Citizens here are abroad see union members as SCHOOLED in dedicated professionalism, we all have a warmth for and appreciation of, what these workers do.

I intentionally invoke the word "school" to help be your ally. Nutmeggers value education highly (some of us in a near-religious way). I'll be the FIRST to espouse that the higher year-round practical education that traditional union workers experience is often more valuable than college degrees and even PhDs. No lathes, no HVAC, no electrical, no pipe-fitting means PhD candidates learn in huts.

My support for good, dedicated state workers comes irrespective of education. I don't care where you went to school. (I have no clue where 7/8 of my office staff went to college). I don't care if you withdrew from high school (I don't use the phrase "drop-out" because you may have had higher priorities than sitting in a classroom with uninspiring teachers). My support for good unions that help workers with low formal education knows no bounds. The union that helps members navigate through bureaucracy, that

gets them more credentials, and that lets them know their bargaining power despite their limited education has the marks of a good union.

The union that speaks up for those who don't speak well for themselves also has the markings of a good union. That refers to negotiating for higher wages and worker safety. I am the ally of that kind of union and people will hear from me that they should support the businesses that enlist these unions and these workers.

But i can't obligate others to. Legislation is force. Legislation about what people buy, how companies deal with workers, or how workers deal within their unionized or non-unionized work force, is not the function of government. Persuasion, not legislation, is the better answer.

I will close by pushing this kind of internal persuasion too: the union that wins workers over by showing what it does FOR them is far better than the union that captures a work force. I've said this for nearly twenty years (see campaign 2000, from late 1999), but now the Janus v ASFCME decision is going to force unions to make new alignments. Don't count on force of law to make you strong. Count on your good deeds and your internal ability to uplift workers.

Don't count on the finances of workers you can't win over. It's immoral in the first place, and now it's become "law". A young unionist owes gratitude and even honor to the older unionists who fought for higher wages, better education, and better safety. But that gratitude and honor does not extend to financial fealty. The union should constantly display its value to young workers, and not appear to siphon from the young to pay for the old.

I humbly suggest unions get out of the pension business. The free market in investments will give your workers better retirement outcomes than a large, restricted pension scheme ever will. I also suggest unions get out of the health insurance business as well. A convoluted Medicare/Obamacare/state-with-union-ties-benefit-plan will never give as much choice and lower cost as Free Markets in health care and health insurance. If unions stick to salary and worker safety and worker education, they and their workers will flourish.

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