

# Letters to the Editor

## Lee A. Saunders: Editorial opposing right-to-work 'bashes' public unions

January 30, 2012

In the Jan. 26 editorial "Those right-to-work states," The Journal is on the right track when it points out that right-to-work states do not fare better economically than states with strong unions that raise the floor for the wages and benefits of members, and all workers generally. However, The Journal takes a wrong turn when it bashes public workers' unions.

The entire labor movement helped create America's middle class and gave birth to the concept of retirement security. Furthermore, all unions have played a role in establishing the workplace protections that keep women and men safe on the job.

The Journal inaccurately says that public employees' "lavish benefits" have undermined government services. In fact, state workers in Rhode Island have kept their promise to contribute to their pensions. They've paid into those pensions on time, every time, regardless of any hardship for their families. But the State of Rhode Island didn't hold up its end of the bargain and make regular payments into the pension system. And the state broke a contractual promise to provide inflation adjustments to retirees on fixed incomes to keep up with the rising costs of basics such as milk and bread.

The Journal either does not understand the value of public workers and their unions, or it is purposely painting an inaccurate picture. The people of Rhode Island -- particularly those who clear the roads, pick up the garbage, teach our kids and police our streets -- deserve respect and honesty from this newspaper.

Lee A. Saunders

The writer is the international secretary-treasurer of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees.