

Hello, this is Tom Cookman with a Community Comment.

More than half the people working in Humboldt County are working for the government. This is true for many areas in our great country. Unfortunately, a majority of these public workers belong to unions. The unions have played a vital role in the development of our country. The unions were able to bring safety and financial stability to the work place. As the unions' membership steadily declined in the private sector, they were very smart when they entrenched themselves in the government work force. Their negotiations have been the key factor in the fact that government jobs have evolved into some of the most coveted jobs out there. The public union worker has excellent health benefits, higher than average wages and a retirement plan that makes those of us in the private sector envious. The problem we are facing as a society is that these phenomenal benefits are very very expensive. Everyone who has a job wants to be paid a lot of money, they want full medical, dental and vision coverage. They want to retire as early as possible with as large of a pension as possible. WE ALL WANT THAT. The problem is that our elected officials are passing laws that are only affecting those of us in the private sector. The Social Security full retirement age is now 67 years old and will probably be higher in the near future. My elected officials have been manipulating the numbers for years in an effort to keep Social Security solvent. The Congress cited improvements in health of older people and increases in average life expectancy as primary reasons for increasing the normal retirement age. That is all fine and dandy, except you shouldn't be allowed to change the rules half way through the game. I am 50 years old and the way Social Security is accelerating towards insolvency, I imagine full retirement age will exceed 70 years by the time I am able to

collect, that is IF Social Security still exists. This is a very frustrating situation when we compare what Congress is doing to those of us in the private sector compared to the people who work for the government. The public workers unions have woven into their contracts the ability for their members to retire at an early age. The most common factor used is 2.7. This means that after an employee is vested in the retirement fund, usually ten years, they can retire as early as age 50 and receive 2.7% of their highest years earnings for every year of service. If they started working at age 18 they would be able to retire with 100% of their highest years earnings at the age of 55. This pension includes medical benefits as well. They can retire with over 86% of their highest years income when they are 50 years old. Let's compare two workers making \$45,000 per year; one a government worker, the other a private sector employee. The government worker retires when he is 55 years old with a monthly pension check of \$3,750. The private sector worker has to work for twelve more years and when he retires he gets a monthly Social Security check of \$1,235. If they both die on the day they turn 78, the government worker will have collected \$1,035,000.00 in pension checks, the private sector employee will get \$163,020.00, not to mention he worked an extra TWELVE years. THIS IS WHY OUR GOVERNMENT IS BROKE. This is why Stockton filed bankruptcy. If you work in the private sector, this should infuriate you. If you work in the public sector, you should be terrified and realize you cannot collect any retirement if the system fails. The unions need to make some major concessions and realize collecting a smaller percentage from a solvent government is better than collecting ZERO percent if the government is bankrupt.

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