



State Council of the International Association of Fire Fighters • California Labor Federation • AFL-CIO

January, 2012

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

I don't need to tell you that California's firefighters and working families are under siege.

The attacks we've seen at the bargaining table and at the ballot box are like nothing I've seen in 30 years as a firefighter and union leader. Things as basic as staffing, workplace safety, decent pay, pensions, health care and survivor benefits are being targeted in city halls and supervisorial chambers up and down California. The attacks echo those on display in Wisconsin, Ohio, Florida and dozens of other states.

The rights and benefits we enjoy were not just handed to us because we're awesome. They were won because we spoke loudly, with a strong, united and effective political voice, at the ballot box and in the halls of government. In Sacramento, California Professional Firefighters has fought tenaciously in the legislative and political arena. Through political action, we've won cancer presumptions, secure retirement, health benefits, survivor benefits, and the Firefighters Bill of Rights. At the local level, your union's influence is directly tied to its ability to speak loudly and carry a big stick at the ballot box.

The single most important firewall protecting you as a professional firefighter is your ability, through your union, to speak up and speak out in the political process. Our enemies know this. That's why their mission in 2012 is to shut us up once and for all.

This November, California voters will be again asked to silence the voice of firefighters and all working families with an initiative we call **"Paycheck Deception."**

- **Bans** ... any voluntary payroll deduction for political action;
- **Mandates** ... an annual written consent from each member individually before collecting dues;
- **Prohibits** ... union contributions to candidates, ballot issues, or independent expenditures;
- **Redefines** ... unions as "government contractors" to impose massive new restrictions on participation.
- **Protects** ... big corporations by allowing them to continue raising and spending millions to attack basic rights

On the surface, it looks a lot like the so-called "reform that then-Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger tried to ram down the people's throats in 2005, as well as Prop. 226 in 1998. Like those efforts, it chokes off your basic right to participate in politics through your union. But this latest version is so sweeping that *it threatens your right to be a member of a union.*

It's not just about politics. It's about your job ... your family ... your future.

The anti-worker forces behind Paycheck Deception 2012 have cloaked their attack in the guise of "campaign reform". But make no mistake – this is about muzzling your voice. And once that happens, everything we've worked for over the course of four decades is at risk.

- **Public safety.** We are the voice of the people when it comes to public safety services. If we can't speak out with a strong voice for their interests, who will?
- **Negotiated contracts.** This is what the attacks are all about – your right to have a seat at the table. You may not like your contract, but if this passes, you eventually might not be able to negotiate *anything*.
- **Secure retirement.** The only thing protecting your pension is your political voice through your state and local union. If that goes away, pensions are history.
- **Firefighter presumptions.** Cities and counties have opposed every single presumption law to protect you and your family from job-related illness. If we lose our political voice, they will come after presumption laws.
- **Preventing outsourcing.** Private fire companies are on the prowl ... in Costa Mesa, San Carlos, and elsewhere. Political action is all that has protected these agencies. **Your job could be at risk!**

A local firefighter from Corona pretty much said it all: "If this passes, we're done. They will come after everything." If we lose "Paycheck Deception", we'll be out of the picture for good. And if only one side can play in the political arena, who do you think is going to win?

Winning this fight won't be easy ... or cheap. Those of you who were around in 2005 may remember that labor spent upwards of \$50 million to take out Arnold's "reforms". Everyone stepped up to the plate, including firefighters. With literally everything at stake, we have to step up again ... with our dollars and with our personal commitment.

This past January, delegates from around the state – all active and retired firefighters – to an urgent CPF Special Convention. At this convention, delegates voted overwhelmingly for a modest dues increase to support the statewide campaign to defeat this predatory initiative.

By stepping up the way we have in the past, firefighters will again take a leadership role in a powerful coalition that includes teachers, nurses, law enforcement and millions of hard-working Californians – the Alliance for a Better California. CPF was one of the co-founders of this alliance, which defeated Arnold's special interest attacks in 2005.

Having a seat at the table is important, but it is only the beginning of a long fight. What I'm asking right now is simple:

- **Get informed:** CPF has produced a video that will be available online and at union meetings. They have also set up a resource page at the CPF website -- www.cpf.org
- **Get involved.** Talk to your union leadership about the issue. When the call comes -- for phone bankers, precinct walkers or just people to stand up at press conferences and rallies, do your part.
- **Stand up for all of labor.** We can't and won't win this fight if we try to go it alone.
- **Get registered.** If you haven't registered to vote yet, what are you waiting for?

I know there are a lot of elections this year – local elections, legislative campaigns and, of course, the national race. **But when it comes to your job and future, it all pales compared to this fight.** The same big money special interests that attacked your brothers and sisters in Wisconsin and Ohio are packing their checkbooks for California.

Together ... and *only* together ... we can stop them.

In strength and solidarity,



Lou Paulson
President, California Professional Firefighters