

## Government benefits: the partisan divide

Opinions vary widely between unions and taxpayer groups.

Not surprisingly, while employers try to find their way through the employee benefits thicket, partisans on both sides of the divide have strong opinions on who is responsible for the current landscape and what actions should be taken to meet revenue losses and increasing expenses.

Kris Vosburgh, executive director of the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association, based in Los Angeles, says that more cuts are needed because taxpayers cannot afford to pay for the compensation that public sector unions have negotiated. "The high costs hit disproportionately hard on the poorest in the community," he says. "Unions have no hesitancy about throwing the poor under the bus to protect their employees."

Barry Broad, a union lobbyist based in Sacramento, Calif., scoffs at the contention that the concerted effort to reduce public sector benefits is based on concern for the poor, but argues instead that it is an ideological crusade by the rich, cynically exploiting the fears of the poor.

"There's no question that they are trying to claw back these benefits," he says. "We resist the best we can against the politics of envy."

At a 2013 conference on the future of retirement plans, Steven Kreisberg, director of collective bargaining for the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), the largest union in the public sector, was indignant about the cutbacks in pensions.

"They don't have the ability to reach into a bank account and take away your money," he says, "but it's OK to reach into a retirement benefit. How do you break promises to people?"