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A \$9 billion rip-off

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A cost-saving recommendation to the state Senate leadership from a coalition of business, municipal and school groups makes so much sense it probably won't fly in the anti-innovative upper chamber: a plan to finally unshackle Pennsylvania from punishing "prevailing wages."

Exactly whose interest do lawmakers uphold by preserving the state's artificially inflated, union-accommodating wages on public jobs? Not workers, who contrary to the union myth won't be relegated to unlivable wages if the state's prevailing wage law dies a deserved death. And certainly not taxpayers, who under the antiquated wage law have no choice but to pay considerably more than what a public job is worth.

Among its goals the coalition -- including the Manufacturer & Business Association, Pennsylvania Association of Boroughs and Pennsylvania School Boards Association -- wants to phase out prevailing wages from school, road and all other taxpayer-funded projects and establish an occupational wage rate predicated on something more meaningful than union whimsy.

Forced prevailing wages average 37 percent higher than what's paid privately for the same work. Statewide, that adds up to *\$9 billion* in additional construction costs each year, according to the Commonwealth Foundation.

And this, when less than a quarter of the state's construction industry is represented by unions.

Isn't it time the tail stops wagging the dog? In Pennsylvania, it's long overdue.

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