

Controller John Liu let taxpayers down by trying to up city's official prevailing wage for movers

EDITORIALS

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City Comptroller John Liu holds himself out as a tough watchdog when he audits others, but has a tendency to fall short of his own standards.

Many are the hidden ways in which a [New York City](#) elected official can do favors for friends at the expense of taxpayers - and [Controller John Liu](#) just got caught trying to pull a doozy.

The controller's office has the little-known responsibility to set the so-called prevailing wages that city contractors must pay their workers. The rule is intended to prevent vendors from lowballing bids for city contracts by paying rock-bottom wages to their staffs.

To determine prevailing wages, the controller surveys what various classes of workers - such as carpenters and plumbers - are making and then sets minimum salaries that contractors will have to pay. No surprise - labor unions love to push up the number.

Liu attempted to bestow such a favor on Teamsters Local 814, which represents workers in the city's moving industry.

As recounted by [Manhattan Supreme Court Justice Alice Schlesinger](#), Liu's office surveyed moving companies and established that 57% were nonunion and 43% union. The most frequently received wage was \$12 an hour.

But that was not good enough for Liu. According to Schlesinger, he contorted laws and statistics to mandate prevailing wages of \$30.63 to \$38.90 an hour. Had that standard been applied, private-sector firms could hire movers at, say, \$12 an hour to relocate their offices while the city would pay roughly three times the rate.

After a moving industry trade group filed suit, Schlesinger called Liu's actions "inconsistent," even "absurd." And right she was.

Liu's office is appealing Schlesinger's decision. That's a mistake. As controller, he is responsible for guarding the public fisc. He holds himself out as a tough watchdog when he audits others, but he has a tendency to fall short of his own standards.

Remember, this is the same official who posted 8,162 illegal election signs using public financing and was fined \$612,150 for the offenses. Then he weaseled out of paying by arguing that the Sanitation Department was required to send him the summonses by certified mail, rather than simply handing them over.

The auditor needs auditing.

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