

Groups to watch

There is no question that conservative foundations and think tanks will put an increased emphasis on attacking public sector unions and public schools after the Supreme Court makes its decision in the **Janus v. AFSCME** case.

They are already spending hundreds of millions of dollars across the nation to elect anti-labor and anti-public education candidates and to produce so-called "research," television ads and mailings to bash unions. The Koch network alone plans to spend \$400 million this year.¹ Virtually all of these organizations aren't required to report their donors.

These groups try to bill themselves as pro-worker – they are not. They want to privatize our public schools, lower taxes for corporations and the wealthy, block access to health care, cut pensions, suppress voters, gerrymander and weaken the political power of unions.

The tentacles of all of these group are already reaching into Minnesota, advocating for vouchers, more charter schools, defined-contribution pensions and the destruction of public employee unions.

State Policy Network

The State Policy Network (SPN) is a web of so-called “think tanks” that push a right-wing agenda in every state across the country, all while reporting little or no lobbying activities.

The \$80 million empire² works to rig the system against working families by pushing for privatizing public schools, blocking expanded access to health care, lowering taxes for corporations and the very wealthy and undermining workers’ rights and unions. SPN and many of its affiliates are members of the controversial American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), where corporate lobbyists and special interest group representatives vote as equals with state lawmakers behind closed doors on “model” legislation that in many cases ends up benefiting the corporations’ bottom line.

SPN and its affiliates are not required to disclose their donors, and almost none of the groups publish a list of funders. Tax documents and other available records reveal that SPN is funded by large corporations, right-wing foundations, and wealthy conservative ideologues such as the Koch brothers, the family of U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos, the Walton family of Walmart and other anti-union organizations.

Center of the American Experiment

The Center of the American Experiment disguises itself as a think tank, but in reality the Minnesota organization is pushing the agenda of its right-wing, corporate donors.

¹ Hochmann, James. "The Daily 202: Koch network laying groundwork to fundamentally transform America's education system." *The Washington Post*. Jan. 30, 2018. Hochmann, James. "The Daily 202: Koch network laying groundwork to fundamentally transform America's education system." *The Washington Post*. Jan. 30, 2018. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/paloma/daily-202/2018/01/30/daily-202-koch-network-laying-groundwork-to-fundamentally-transform-america-s-education-system/5a6feb8530fb041c3c7d74db/?utm_term=.26d8c20cf0a2

² Peterson, Kyle. "The Spoils of the Republican State Conquest." *The Wall Street Journal*. Dec. 9, 2016. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-spoils-of-the-republican-state-conquest-1481326770>.

The group, started in 1990, is an arm of the State Policy Network and has money from right wing charities and foundations like the [Bradley Foundation](#) and the JM Foundation. They brought in nearly \$1.2 million in 2015³ and nearly \$2 million in 2016.⁴

The Center of the American Experiment's promotes school privatization and vouchers, the traditional two-parent family structure and vehemently opposes programs that protect LGBTQ community or advocate for people of color.

Kim Crockett of the Center of the American Experiment praised President Donald Trump's Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos's plan to provide public money for private school vouchers. "We have generations of students who've attended failing public schools. That's unacceptable," Crockett said.⁵ "The more government gets involved, the less impressive the product has become."

Freedom Foundation of Minnesota

The Freedom Foundation bills itself as a free-market think tank that supports limited government, but is a member of the State Policy Network and pushes much of the ALEC-backed corporate agenda. It was started by longtime conservative activist Annette Meeks in 2007.

The 501(c)3 brought in about \$350,628 in 2015⁶, much of it from unknown individual donors and program revenue. Over the years, the Freedom Foundation has received money from right-wing groups like the State Policy Network, including \$60,000 in 2015.⁷

Its "research" is aimed at fighting against minimum wage increases or expanding access to affordable health insurance and instead advocating for tax breaks for the wealthiest corporations at the expense of working families.

Americans for Prosperity

Americans for Prosperity is a right-wing political advocacy group founded by billionaire brothers David and Charles Koch, the owners of Koch Industries.

The Koch network plans to spend around \$400 million on politics and policy during the 2018 election cycle, with an increased emphasis on education – expanding vouchers and breaking the teacher unions.⁸

³ IRS Form 990. 2015.

⁴ Prather, Shannon. "Center of the American Experiment ramps up in Minnesota." *Star Tribune*. Dec. 7, 2016. <http://www.startribune.com/a-conservative-think-tank-launches-a-populous-movement/405356926/>.

⁵ Magan, Christopher. "DeVos fight stokes Minnesota's debate over charters, school choice." *Pioneer Press*. Feb. 10, 2017. <https://www.twincities.com/2017/02/10/devos-fight-stokes-minnesotas-debate-over-charters-school-choice/>.

⁶ IRS Form 990. 2015.

⁷ IRS Form 990. 2015.

⁸ Hochmann, James. "The Daily 202: Koch network laying groundwork to fundamentally transform America's education system." *The Washington Post*. Jan. 30, 2018. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/paloma/daily-202/2018/01/30/daily-202-koch-network-laying-groundwork-to-fundamentally-transform-america-s-education-system/5a6feb8530fb041c3c7d74db/?utm_term=.26d8c20cf0a2

AFP shares those goals, and its budget has surged from \$7 million in 2007 to \$115 million in 2012⁹. It was one of the conservative groups instrumental in getting Scott Walker elected governor of Wisconsin and helping him push through legislation to bust public employee unions.¹⁰

Tim Phillips, the president of Americans for Prosperity, highlighted field operations that the network has built in 36 states to advance its agenda, including on education. "We have more grassroots members in Wisconsin than the Wisconsin teachers' union has members," he said. "That's how you change a state!"¹¹

AFP has already fought against campaign finance transparency and taxes for roads and bridges in Minnesota.¹² The group hired a grassroots organizer to work in Minnesota last May¹³ and inserted itself into a Duluth decision to ban the sale of flavored tobacco in the city.¹⁴

The Laura and John Arnold Foundation

The Arnold Foundation is spending millions of dollars a year to end defined benefit pensions for public employees and privatize our public schools across the nation.

Former Enron executive and hedge fund manager John Arnold is using his fortune to shape public policy -- \$108 million to the foundation in 2015 alone.¹⁵ About \$32.6 million of that went toward education and another \$4 million to dismantling pensions.

Privatizing public education is a top goal for the Arnold Foundation. Between 2011 and 2016, the foundation awarded more than \$200 million in education grants, mainly to promote the portfolio model of school governance.¹⁶

The "portfolio model" is really code for unfettered charter school expansion and closing public schools. Take for example New Orleans, which after Hurricane Katrina turned all but five schools into charter schools.¹⁷ The Arnold Foundation has been a huge contributor to that effort, giving \$10.8 million in 2015. Now, 93 percent of New Orleans students are in charter schools.

⁹ IRS Form 990. 2013.

¹⁰ Healey, Patrick and Davey, Monica. "Conservatives and Their Cash Lined Up Early Behind Walker." *The New York Times*. June 8, 2015. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/08/us/politics/behind-scott-walker-a-longstanding-conservative-alliance-against-unions.html>

¹¹ Hochmann, James. "The Daily 202: Koch network laying groundwork to fundamentally transform America's education system." *The Washington Post*. Jan. 30, 2018. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/paloma/daily-202/2018/01/30/daily-202-koch-network-laying-groundwork-to-fundamentally-transform-america-s-education-system/5a6feb8530fb041c3c7d74db/?utm_term=.26d8c20cf0a2

¹² Americans for Prosperity. <https://americansforprosperity.org/victories-far-year-2/>

¹³ Americans for Prosperity. <https://americansforprosperity.org/americans-prosperity-minnesota-announces-kelly-gunderson-new-grassroots-director/>

¹⁴ Americans for Prosperity. <https://americansforprosperity.org/duluth-overreach-will-hurt-economy-remove-consumer-choice/>

¹⁵ IRS Form 990. 2015.

¹⁶ Perry, Paul and Callahan, David. "Betting on a New Model for Schools: Inside Arnold's K-12 Grantmaking." *Inside Philanthropy*. May 26, 2017. <https://www.insidephilanthropy.com/home/2017/5/26/arnold-foundation-portfolio-model-grants>

¹⁷ Orleans Parish School Board website. <https://opsb.us/schools/>

This organization is also inserting itself in the pension debate in Minnesota. A University of Minnesota research fellow whose research is funded in part by the Arnold Foundation testified in front of the Legislative Commission on Pensions and Retirement on Jan. 24. And a representative from the Pew Charitable Trust, which has received \$9.7 million from the Arnold Foundation, will testify Feb. 19.¹⁸

National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation

Established in 1968, the National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation's mission is to "eliminate coercive union power and compulsory unionism abuses through strategic litigation, public information, and education programs."¹⁹

This political group, which aims to weaken the power of working people through court challenges, is the same organization that brought the Harris v. Quinn case to the Supreme Court. Its sister group, the National Right to Work Committee, works for legislation that is "combatting the evils of compulsory unionism."²⁰

The foundation is involved in a lawsuit filed last year in Minnesota federal court by two court employees who claim unions shouldn't be able to collect fair-share fees from all employees they represent.

The National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation has an active campaign to fight unionization in charter schools. It also has a project to fight employees from being forced to financially support a union if it conflicts with religious beliefs and created the Concerned Educators Against Forced Unionism.

National Right to Work Committee

The National Right to Work Committee, formed in 1955, helps state organizations to promote, enact and protect state right-to-work laws.

Its website touts recent right-to-work wins in Indiana, Michigan and Wisconsin, and includes model right-to-work legislation. The group brought in about \$10.8 million in revenue in 2016.²¹

Partnership for Educational Justice

The Partnership for Educational Justice was started by former-journalist-turned-school privatization activist Campbell Brown.

This group was formed to mount legal battles across the nation to eliminate tenure and seniority protections for public school teachers. So far, the group has filed lawsuit in Minnesota, New Jersey and New York to get rid tenure and other due process rights.²²

The Forslund case is currently pending in the Minnesota Supreme Court.

¹⁸ "Commission explores public pension privatization." *Minnesota Teachers Retirement Association*. Jan. 25, 2018.

<https://www.minnesotatra.org/images/pdf/Capitol%20TRAcKER-012518.pdf>

¹⁹ National Right to Work Legal Foundation. <http://www.nrtw.org/en/about>

²⁰ National Right to Work Committee. <https://nrtwc.org/about/>

²¹ IRS Form 990. 2016.

²² Partnership for Educational Justice. <http://edjustice.org/projects/mn/>

So-called "union alternatives"

These organizations swoop in once a state becomes right to work.

They will try to bill themselves as alternatives to the union. What they won't tell you is they provide liability insurance and pared-down legal services – and little more. Little or low-quality professional development, no help on contract negotiations, no support on working conditions, no lobbying for public education and public school staff, and no help passing your local levy.

And they proactively work against the things we know are good for students and educators.

Association of American Educators (AAE)

AAE, established in 1994, doesn't represent teachers in collective bargaining and claims to be free of any political agendas or political activism. It provides members with liability insurance, legal counsel in workplace employment issues, and teacher scholarships and grants.

So far, AAE has about 6,200 members at most with state chapters in Arkansas, Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Oregon and Washington and a partner organization in Louisiana. Two of its biggest donors are the anti-union Walton Family Foundation and Bradley Foundation. Several other conservative foundations have given the association grants as well.²³

Christian Educators Association International (CEAI)

This group was one of the plaintiffs in the Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association Supreme Court case, one of the slew of cases brought on by anti-union interests.

Despite its name, 95 percent of its members are public school educators. CEAI started in 1953 and now has about 6,500 members, experiencing much of its growth since 1991 when the association started to provide liability insurance²⁴.

The group's mission is to "proclaim God's word as the source of wisdom and knowledge," including preserving "our Judeo-Christian heritage and values through education" and "the legal rights of Christians in public schools."²⁵

National Association of Professional Educators (NAPE)

A group of Los Angeles teachers formed the first Professional Educators chapter in 1972, two years after a teachers strike. The group has opposed teacher strikes and supported a National Right to Work Act as well.²⁶

²³ Cohen, Rick. "Watch Out for a 2014 Conservative Foundation Strategy Attacking Public Unions." *Nonprofit Quarterly*. Jan. 8, 2015. <https://nonprofitquarterly.org/2014/01/08/watch-out-for-a-2014-conservative-foundation-strategy-attacking-public-unions/>

²⁴ Kirkpatrick, David. "Alternative Teacher Organizations: Evolution of Professional Associations." <http://reason.org/files/9d6b31ffd20221f8cc40a7a66801f98d.pdf>

²⁵ Christian Educators Association International. <https://ceai.org/about-us/>

²⁶ Kirkpatrick, David. "Alternative Teacher Organizations: Evolution of Professional Associations." <http://reason.org/files/9d6b31ffd20221f8cc40a7a66801f98d.pdf>

Like other independent groups, they have no office in the Washington, D.C. area nor do they have a regularly staffed office anywhere. It appears they have no website and have affiliates in 24 states. Many of those are also affiliated with the American Association of Educators.

NAPE is not well known and seems to have hit its peak many years ago. No membership information is available for them. Some estimates had their paying membership as low as 2,000 in the 1990s.²⁷

As former NAPE Executive Secretary Philip Strittmatter has written, "We do not criticize teachers for joining the unions if they want to do that. We just want to be free to represent those educators who prefer a professional organization that does not get involved with radical social political issues not related to the education of children."²⁸

Coalition of Independent Education Associations (CIEA)

The CIEA is a cooperative of associations. The coalition is loosely structured. It wants to bill itself as an alternative to the National Education Association and American Federation of Teachers, but lacks an independently staffed office, operates on a very low budget and has no presence or visibility at the national level.²⁹

CIEA lists 24 independent state groups as members. The Texas group (ATPE) reports that it is the largest teacher organization in the state, with at least 100,000 members, but has used this unchanged figure for several years

²⁷ <http://www.professionalloklahoeducators.org/affiliate%20organizations>

²⁸ Kirkpatrick, David. "Alternative Teacher Organizations: Evolution of Professional Associations." <http://reason.org/files/9d6b31ffd20221f8cc40a7a66801f98d.pdf>

²⁹ Kirkpatrick, David. "Alternative Teacher Organizations: Evolution of Professional Associations." <http://reason.org/files/9d6b31ffd20221f8cc40a7a66801f98d.pdf>