

Groups to watch

The labor movement continues to make gains, but conservative foundations and think tanks carry on with their attacks on public sector unions and public schools.

They are 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 pledged to spend \$400 million during the 2018 election cycle.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 these group reach into Minnesota, advocating for vouchers, more charter schools, defined-contribution pensions and the destruction of public employee unions.

Their goal is simple. They want to divide Americans across racial, religious and economic lines.

State Policy Network

The State Policy Network 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, 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 family, 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/ Educated Teachers MN

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 and running active campaigns to get Education Minnesota members to leave their union.

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 more than \$3.7 million in 2018.⁴

The Center of the American Experiment promotes school privatization and vouchers, the traditional two-parent family structure and vehemently opposes programs that protect the 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.⁵ Crockett also made racist remarks about Somali-American refugees in a June 20, 2019, New York Times article.

“I think of America, the great assimilator, as a rubber band, but with this — we’re at the breaking point,” Crockett said. “These aren’t people coming from Norway, let’s put it that way. These people are very visible.”

CAE is actively trying to get Education Minnesota members to leave the union. The drop campaign is Educated Teachers MN, which started in summer 2018. The front group unsuccessfully sent educators up to a dozen misleading mailers about their union each year in 2018 and 2019.⁶

Mackinac Center for Public Policy

This is another fake think tank that is really just another arm of the State Policy Network's right-wing propaganda network.

The Mackinac Center, founded in 1987 in Michigan, has pushed for more charter schools, vouchers for private schools, decimating pensions for educators and other public employees, putting caps on educators' health insurance, using test scores to evaluate teachers, getting rid of tenure – the list goes on and on.⁷

Like other groups backed by dark money, the Mackinac Center doesn't disclose its funders. Tax documents and other available records reveal that it is funded by the usual suspects of wealthy, conservative ideologues such as the Dow Chemical family, the anti-worker Bradley Foundation, the Koch family, the family of U.S. Secretary Betsy DeVos, the Walton family of Walmart and other anti-union, anti-public education organizations.

The Mackinac Center has launched a “My Pay, My Say” website to try and get union members across the nation to opt out of their union. Fellow State Policy Network groups like the Center of the American Experiment are pushing this out as well.⁸

⁴ IRS Form 990. 2017.

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 Educated Teachers MN. <http://www.educatedteachersmn.com/>

⁷ Mackinac Center for Public Policy website. <https://www.mackinac.org/education>

⁸ Eidelson, Josh. "Koch Brothers-Linked Group Declares New War on Unions." *Bloomberg News*. June 27, 2018. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-06-27/koch-brothers-linked-group-declares-new-war-on-union>

Freedom Foundation of Minnesota

The Freedom Foundation bills itself as a free-market think tank that supports limited government, but it 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 \$362,987 in 2017,⁹ 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 2015.¹⁰

Its “research” is aimed at fighting minimum wage increases or affordable health insurance and instead advocates for tax breaks for the wealthiest corporations at the expense of working families.

Project Veritas

Project Veritas, a conservative media organization dedicated to secretly infiltrating progressive organizations to produce unflattering and deceptive videos, is targeting educator unions across the country.

The organization was founded by James O'Keefe, a protégé of Andrew Breitbart, in 2010. Project Veritas has been criticized for editing its videos to deceive its audience and misrepresent its subjects. Operatives have targeted a number of high-profile organizations through the years including ACORN, Planned Parenthood and, most recently, NEA and AFT affiliates around the country.

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. David Koch died in 2019.

The Koch network promised 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.¹¹

AFP shares those goals, and its budget surged from \$7 million in 2007; the group brought in \$96.5 million in 2018. AFP was instrumental in getting Scott Walker elected governor of Wisconsin and helping him push through legislation to bust public employee unions.¹³

Tim Phillips AFP president, highlighted field operations that the network has built in 36 states to advance its agenda, including on education. “We have more grass- roots members in Wisconsin than the Wisconsin teachers’ union has members,” he said. “That’s how you change a state!”¹⁴

⁹ IRS Form 990. 2017.

¹⁰ IRS Form 990. 2015.

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

¹³ 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>

¹⁴ 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 has already fought against campaign finance transparency and taxes for roads and bridges in Minnesota.¹⁵ The group's foundation texted some Minnesota educators in 2019 urging them to drop their membership.

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 – \$155.4 million to the foundation in 2017 alone.¹⁸ More than \$36 million of that went toward education and nearly \$6 million for efforts to dismantle 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.¹⁹

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.²⁰ The Arnold Foundation has been a huge contributor to that effort, giving \$10.8 million in 2015 alone. Now, 93 percent of New Orleans students are in charter 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, 2018. And a representative from the Pew Charitable Trust, which has received \$9.7 million from the Arnold Foundation, testified Feb. 19, 2018.²¹

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."²²

This political group aims to weaken the power of working people through court challenges and is the same organization that brought the *Harris v. Quinn* case to the Supreme Court. This includes a litany of cases against unions since the *Janus v. AFSCME* decision. Its sister group, the National Right to Work Committee, works for legislation that is "combatting the evils of compulsory unionism."²³

¹⁵ Americans for Prosperity. <https://americansforprosperity.org/victories-far-year-2/>

¹⁸ IRS Form 990. 2017.

¹⁹ 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>

²⁰ Orleans Parish School Board website. <https://opsb.us/schools/>

²¹ "Commission explores public pension privatization." *Minnesota Teachers Retirement Association*. Jan. 25, 2018.

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

²² National Right to Work Legal Foundation. <http://www.nrtw.org/en/about>

²³ National Right to Work Committee. <https://nrtwc.org/about/>

The foundation was involved in a lawsuit filed in 2017 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 and promotes model right-to-work legislation. The group brought in about \$12.3 million in revenue in 2018.²⁴

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.²⁵

The *Forslund* case was dismissed by the Minnesota Court of Appeals in 2019.

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, 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.

The group started running digital ads targeting Minnesota educators in August and September 2020.

²⁴ IRS Form 990. 2018.

²⁵ Partnership for Educational Justice. <http://edjustice.org/projects/mn/>

It is unclear how many members they have in its 10 state chapters or partner organizations. But it must be small. The group only brought in \$2.2 million in 2018. 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.²⁶

Christian Educators Association International

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 insurance²⁷.

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."²⁸

National Association of Professional Educators

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.²⁹

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.

Membership numbers are unknown, but the Professional Association of Georgia Educators claims to have 97,000 members.

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."³¹

Coalition of Independent Education Associations

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.³²

CIEA lists 15 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.

²⁶ 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/>

²⁷ Kirkpatrick, David. "Alternative Teacher Organizations: Evolution of Professional Associations." <http://reason.org/files/9d6b31ffd20221f8cc40a7a66801f98d.pdf>

²⁸ Christian Educators Association International. <https://ceai.org/about-us/>

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

³¹ Kirkpatrick, David. "Alternative Teacher Organizations: Evolution of Professional Associations."

³² Kirkpatrick, David. "Alternative Teacher Organizations: Evolution of Professional Association"