

Supreme Court Case Threatens Public-Sector Unions

Background

The U.S. Supreme Court is hearing a case called *Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association*. The lawsuit is backed by the Center for Individual Rights, a front group for wealthy anti-union extremists. If five justices side with them, it could turn America into a “right-to-work” nation for public employees.

Oral arguments were heard January 11, 2016. A decision is expected by summer.

What Minnesotans Are Saying

Connie Andrews, Itasca State Park worker, lifelong AFSCME member:

“Working women want a seat at the table, a voice on the job, and a fair shake in our economy. We want to work union so our families can live better.”

Anna Angeles-Farris, Lakeville school custodian, SEIU: “Because my co-workers and I have stood together in our union, our jobs are good jobs that support our families, enrich our schools, and provide great services for our community.”

Shannon Jax, special education teacher, Education Minnesota: “The *Friedrichs* lawsuit will make it harder for educators to fight for what our children need, like hiring more counselors and other support staff to help our students focus on learning.”

Chris Parsons, St. Paul firefighter, MPFF: “The anti-union forces behind the *Friedrichs* case are trying to turn back the clock on the labor movement and the middle class by crippling public-sector unions’ ability to effectively bargain for our members.”

Ryan Lee, food inspector, MAPE Local 910: “It’s dangerous to pit a lone individual against the will of the government. Public workers are stronger when we stick together.”

St. Paul Mayor Chris Coleman: “For cities, this case would interfere with our ability to resolve our own workplace decisions and agreements. And it would put at risk the working relationships we have with our public-service workers and their unions that ensure labor peace, set standards for workplace conditions and, most important, provide effective and efficient services to residents and taxpayers.”

Ramsey County Attorney John Choi: “If the *Friedrichs* decision upends existing labor law, it could jeopardize our ability to ensure effective delivery of services. For us to effectively deliver public services, we need strong lines of communication with all public safety workers, not a disorganized and underrepresented workforce. When management and labor work together good things happen.”

Carmen Brown, hospital worker at HCMC, AFSCME Local 977: “If unions lose resources, workers lose the power to lift up our families and our communities. Women and people of color benefit most from working union, so we’ve got a lot to lose.”

Dennis Frazier, St. Louis County child protection worker, AFSCME Local 66: “Minnesota’s kids are smarter, our families are healthier, and our communities are safer when public workers raise our united voices at the Capitol.”

Judy Wahlberg, president, AFSCME Council 5: “We intend to give future generations the opportunity to grow up in a country where work is rewarded, not exploited. The Supreme Court needs to know that our unions are a powerful force for upward mobility and economic security in America.”

Eliot Seide, executive director, AFSCME Council 5: “Collective bargaining extends democracy into the workplace. Saying we don’t need union contracts to protect workers is like saying we don’t need the Constitution to protect civil rights.”

Oral arguments: A complete [transcript](#) can be found [here](#).

Opinions

[State of the unions: Supreme Court case could hurt Minnesotans we serve](#)

Worker commentary by Connie Andrews, Anna Angeles-Farris and Steve Odmark
Star Tribune 01/07/16

[Court must stand behind organized labor](#)

By Lori Smith, head cook in St. Cloud School District, SEIU Local 284 member
St. Cloud Times 01/10/11

[Supreme Court case could harm all workers](#)

By Judy Wahlberg, AFSCME Council 5 president – *Duluth News Tribune* 01/12/16

[As workplace rights crumble, roads and bridges could follow suit](#)

By Bart Andersen, bridge inspector – *Duluth News Tribune* 11/19/15

[Not just teachers: Court case puts cities at risk, too](#)

By St. Paul Mayor Chris Coleman – *Star Tribune* 01/11/16

[Supreme Court case could undermine labor management partnerships](#)

By Ramsey County Attorney John Choi – *Pioneer Press* 01/10/16

[This Supreme Court Case Could Make All Public Unions “Right to Work”](#)

The Nation 01/07/16

[At the Supreme Court, A Big Threat to Unions](#)

New York Times 01/10/16

[Should non-union teachers be forced to pay dues?](#)

Los Angeles Times 01/11/16

[Friedrichs: Son of Bush v. Gore](#)

By Harold Meyerson – *The American Prospect* 01/12/16

SCOTUSblog: [Amy Howe: Union fees in jeopardy: In Plain English](#)

SCOTUSblog: [Lyle Denniston: Argument analysis: The question not asked](#)