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Summary:

While more than 30 percent of Oregon union households would opt out of union membership if they could do so without penalty, a large number don't know they actually have the right to do that.

Word Count 585

“...[O]ver 65,000 of Oregon’s some 243,000 union members don’t realize that membership and some dues are optional. This is even more surprising given that their so-called ‘Beck rights’ granted by the Supreme Court in 1988 are named after Harry Beck who is now retired in Oregon and still advocating for worker freedom.”

Put Individual Rights Above Those of Powerful Unions

By Steve Buckstein

By the time the U.S. Supreme Court rules in the [Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association](#) case next June, Rebecca Friedrichs may be the most well-known public school teacher in America—and the most controversial. She is asking the Court to uphold the Constitutional First Amendment free speech and free association rights of all California public school teachers, and by extension all public sector workers across America, against the demands of unions that now require even non-members to pay “agency fees” or “fair share dues.”

The Friedrichs case is just the latest to come before the Supreme Court pitting individual workers against the powerful unions that seek to take their money without their consent. In [Abood v. Detroit Board of Education](#) (1977), public sector unions were allowed to impose fees on all workers for collective bargaining purposes. Then, in [Communication Workers of America v. Beck](#) (1988), the Court found that unions could not compel fees for political purposes that workers opposed. Finally, just last year in [Harris v. Quinn](#), the Court went further and ruled that at least some workers could opt out of both the political and bargaining portions of public sector union dues. This set the stage for freeing all public sector workers from any forced union dues, which is what the *Friedrichs* decision hopefully will accomplish.

In Oregon, there also may be a [citizen’s initiative](#) on the ballot next November granting freedom from all union dues for public employees. Public employees are the focus of this initiative, and the *Friedrichs* case, because it has become clear that all public sector union activities are political, including the inherently political act of collective bargaining with public bodies. Union arguments that they should collect fees from all workers because they represent them all increasingly ring hollow because unions lobby to represent everyone. They could just as well lobby to only represent those who voluntarily agree to pay them.

Several scientific surveys have been conducted to see how the public and members of union households feel about these issues. The 2013 survey found that more than 30 percent of Oregon union households would opt out of union membership if they could do so without penalty. Last year, more than 80 percent of all Oregonians surveyed agreed that employees should be able choose whether or not to join a union or pay union dues. This year’s survey again asked members of union households the following question:

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“Are you aware that you can opt-out of union membership and of paying a portion of your union dues without losing your job or any other penalty?”

Surprisingly, over 27 percent of Oregon union household members surveyed answered No. This implies that over 65,000 of Oregon’s some [243,000 union members](#) don’t realize that membership and some dues are optional. This is even more surprising given that their so-called “Beck rights” granted by the Supreme Court in 1988 are named after Harry Beck who is now retired in Oregon and still [advocating for worker freedom](#).

These surveys were conducted for [National Employee Freedom Week](#), which this year runs from August 16th through the 22nd.

Rebecca Friedrichs is taking her case to the Supreme Court because, [in her own words](#), “It’s time to set aside this union name calling and all this fear mongering and let’s put America and her children first, and let’s put the rights of individuals above the rights of these powerful unions.”

“Put[ting] the rights of individuals above the rights of these powerful unions” is something every Oregonian should support.

Steve Buckstein is Founder and Senior Policy Analyst at Cascade Policy Institute, Oregon’s free market public policy research organization.

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