

# The Truth About the Freedom Foundation

The Freedom Foundation is a right-wing, anti-union group based in Olympia, Washington that has a long history of lying to the public about their activities – even resorting to illegal actions. The Freedom Foundation has spent millions of dollars and years of staff time trying to turn the “blue” states of Washington, Oregon and California “red” by attacking working families and so far have nothing to show for it. They have failed their donors and in a desperate attempt to make up for it they have often resorted to illegal activities to remain credible and spouted continuous lies about their impact. The Freedom Foundation may think they are fooling the public, but the Northwest Accountability Project is committed to holding organizations like this accountable. Below we have outlined just some of the lies the Freedom Foundation has used when describing their organization and their activities.

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***LIE #1: Freedom Foundation CEO Tom McCabe boasts that they have hired 80 canvassers for door to door badgering of union members after the AFSCME v. Janus decision.***

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## **The Lie:**

On June 28, 2018 CEO Tom McCabe appeared on an episode of the [Hugh Hewitt Show](#) and said, "**We sent 80 canvassers into the field this morning to talk to teachers in their homes about the opportunity they now have to leave their union.**"<sup>1</sup> This lie was repeated throughout newspapers in the weeks following the Janus decision.

## **The Truth:**

The Freedom Foundation has severely overstated the scope and efficacy of their so-called “Opt-Out” canvassing program. **Eyewitness reports document less than 17 Freedom Foundation canvassers since the Janus decision spotted across the entire Pacific Northwest at a meager 3 canvassing events.** Many of the canvassers were seen just once. New reports and eye witness accounts also show these canvassers (many of whom are college students) have very little to no knowledge of the labor movement or collective bargaining. (for more about their canvassers see [FreedomFoundationCanvassers.com](#)).

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***LIE #2: Freedom Foundation staffer Maxford Nelson again lies about their outreach program but this time claims that the Freedom Foundation has only dozens of staffers talking to union members.***

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## **The Lie:**

During an interview on September 13, 2018, [Mitchell Hartmann of Marketplace](#) spoke to Freedom Foundation staffer **Max Nelsen, who claimed that they had, "...hired dozens of**

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<sup>1</sup> *Hugh Hewitt Radio 06/28/2018 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BCe1Qf8RlgU>*

**campaign workers since the spring to do mailings, social media outreach and door-to-door visits with public employees on the West Coast."**<sup>2</sup>

### **The Truth:**

Even dozens is a far stretch. Based on our tracking the Freedom Foundation has hired less than 17 canvassers since the Janus decision and they have only canvassed a few times since the Janus decision. Many of the canvassers were seen just once. Dirk Vanderhart, a reporter with Oregon Public Broadcasting (OPB) went "canvassing" with the Freedom Foundation. [He wrote an article about it on July 29, 2018](#). The Freedom Foundation sent their lead Policy Analyst out with Vanderhart as they likely did not have any canvassers to send. They didn't have any conversations with union members and the last person on their list, had been retired for more than six years implying their list was out of date.

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**LIE #3: *The Freedom Foundation claims to have "destroyed" two SEIU unions that represent home-care and child-care workers in Washington and Oregon.***

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### **The Lie:**

At the end of 2017, the Freedom Foundation sent a fundraising letter claiming they had destroyed SEIU 925, which represents childcare workers in Washington and SEIU 503 which represents homecare workers and state workers in Oregon.



- We've effectively broken two of the largest unions in the Pacific Northwest—SEIU 925 in Washington and SEIU 503 in Oregon. The latter saw 40 percent of its membership leave the union and voted to surrender its nonprofit corporation status to prevent us from communicating with the remaining members about their legal right to give themselves a raise by leaving.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.marketplace.org/2018/09/13/business/after-janus-battle-union-members-wallets>

**The Truth:**

Both SEIU 925 and SEIU 503 are vibrant unions that advocate for better wages, benefits and working conditions for their members and they play a major role in impacting policy and elections in the Northwest. The Freedom Foundation's claims about membership levels are misleading.<sup>3</sup>

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***LIE #4: In a letter to funders, the Freedom Foundation claims to have convinced 21,000 workers to terminate their union membership.***

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**The Lie:**

In the same letter (see lie number 3), the FF told their funders that 21,000 members had opted out of unions in the Northwest. This is a topic they regularly lie about.

- The Freedom Foundation has freed more than 21,000 people from paying forced union dues, costing the unions more than \$18 million that otherwise would be going to fund liberal candidates in next year's midterm elections.

**The Truth:**

Not one union in the Northwest saw a significant reduction in union membership prior to the Janus decision when this letter was written. The same is true since the Janus decision. Unions in the northwest are showing strong membership numbers and dues revenue, which speaks to their strength despite the many attacks being levied against unions today.

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***LIE #5: A Freedom Foundation staffer writes a newspaper op-ed filled with false, conspiratorial statements about a restructuring of SEIU 503.***

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**The Lie:**

In April of 2017, The Oregonian printed an Op-ed from the Freedom Foundation's former Oregon Director, Anne Marie Gurney that contained so many lies, the Oregonian had to ask for a rewrite. At least seven times, Anne Marie Gurney lied about SEIU 503 changing its non-profit status including writing that they were changing to a "for-profit corporation," stating that union members could be held liable for the actions of the union and that the union would need re-certification.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.dol.gov/olms/regs/compliance/rrlo/lmrda.htm>

## The Truth:

The op-ed was so disingenuous that the Oregonian forced the Freedom Foundation to change the op-ed within 24 hours. The final printed version, forced into factual parameters, was radically different than the original.<sup>4</sup>

Below, the original Op-Ed. Statements circled in red were later redacted or corrected.

By Guest Columnist  
Follow on Twitter  
on April 13, 2017 at 3:45 PM, updated April 13, 2017 at 3:56 PM

Print  
Email

**By Anne Marie Gurney**

In little time, Service Employees International Union 503 bosses went from full-speed-ahead to full-reverse in their decision to reorganize their union.

Those who run SEIU 503 - the union that represents Medicaid-compensated home health care workers in Oregon - were contemplating changing its business model from a nonprofit to a for-profit corporation.

Just days before a scheduled vote on the question, however, SEIU 503's leadership was forced to cancel it. There have been no indications when an alternate date might be announced.

Oregon statutes for nonprofit organizations require that members be given access to specific information. In the case of SEIU 503, this includes the contact information for all the workers from whom it receives dues. But giving that mailing list to anyone puts the union at risk of having an informed and educated membership - something SEIU 503 leaders want to avoid.

What is it the union doesn't want its members to know? It's that in-home health care workers now have a choice about whether to join the union or not because of a 2014 U.S. Supreme Court decision.

For-profit corporations do not owe members this type of information. If SEIU 503 somehow manages to persuade its members to vote against their own interests, the union will emerge with even more power and less transparency.

SEIU 503 would be able to keep membership lists secret, impeding communication. And, after losing the protections afforded by nonprofit status, those same members could be held legally liable for actions of the leaders.

Similarly, the proposed change to the union's status would eliminate the necessity of holding annual meetings at which union members can ask questions. Instead, the union could simply post its annual report online. The annual meeting requirement was reinforced three years ago, when SEIU 503 lost a lawsuit to one of its own members.

Lastly, a significant change of business formation brings into question the union's standing and would possibly trigger a need to be recertified. Recertification is a vote to decide if the union should represent this group at all - and leave open the possibility of another union taking over. Clearly this would not be satisfactory to SEIU 503.

Anne Marie Gurney is the Salem-based Oregon director of the Freedom Foundation.

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**LIE #6: A Freedom Foundation staffer tells a podcast host that all of their funding comes from voluntary, local donors around the Northwest.**

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## The Lie:

On July 18, 2018, Freedom Foundation staffer Max Nelsen appeared on the Seattle Times' podcast, "The Overcast" and told hosts Jim Brunner and Daniel Beekman, "We get our funding entirely from voluntary contributions from donors around the Northwest."<sup>5</sup>

## The Truth:

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<sup>4</sup> [https://www.oregonlive.com/opinion/index.ssf/2017/04/the\\_reorganization\\_of\\_a\\_union.html](https://www.oregonlive.com/opinion/index.ssf/2017/04/the_reorganization_of_a_union.html)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/podcast-freedom-foundations-maxford-nelsen-on-battling-public-sector-unions/>

The Freedom Foundation is a member of the Koch Brother funded State Policy Network, a national network of extremist right-wing organizations. The Northwest Accountability Project has conducted research and found the 990s of a number of foundations located outside of the Northwest, including Wisconsin's Bradley Foundation, Pennsylvania's Sarah Scaife Foundation and the Walton Foundation, all indicating they have given to the Freedom Foundation. In May of 2017, the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel reported that the Bradley Foundation had given \$1.5 million dollars to the Freedom Foundation.<sup>6</sup>

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***LIE #7: The Freedom Foundation claims that the president of SEIU 775 was stepping down due to a corrosive culture and bleak outlook for the union.***

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**The Lie:**

In October of 2018, Tom McCabe, the Freedom Foundation CEO, wrote in their fundraising letter Living Liberty, "David Rolf, once considered the gold boy of the SEIU - if not the entire US labor movement - was ousted from his post as President of Washington's SEIU 775, one of the most corrosive labor unions in the country."

**The Truth:**

SEIU 775 is a vibrant and ever-growing union that has seen its membership increase tenfold in the years since its inception in 2002. They have fought for and won increased wages and better healthcare. According to SEIU 775's bylaws, a President can only serve for 16 years. David Rolf served from 2002-2018 and could not run again.

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***LIE #8: The Freedom Foundation claims that union cards signed before the Janus decision are no longer valid.***

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**The Lie:**

In July of 2018, the Freedom Foundation sent unsolicited and false legal advice to HR directors in Oregon stating: "An agreement to pay union dues must have been executed on or after June 27, 2018 to be valid."

**The Truth:**

This is a self-serving opinion of the Freedom Foundation that no court or public official has validated. The Attorney's General in both Washington and Oregon have provided guidance on the AFSCME v. Janus Decision, ordering the exact opposite to the claims of the Freedom Foundation.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://projects.jsonline.com/news/2017/5/5/hacked-records-show-bradley-foundation-taking-wisconsin-model-national.html>

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**LIE #9: Publicly, the Freedom Foundation claims to care about workers' rights and freedoms and even to support collective bargaining.**

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**The Lie:**

The entire stated mission of the Freedom Foundation is a lie. In their propaganda, they claim to care about union members, support the formation of unions and support union member's rights' to collectively bargain.

**The Truth:**

The Freedom Foundation is a political organization fueled by out-of-state billionaires whose objective is to "defund and defang"<sup>7</sup> unions and the "political left"<sup>8</sup> in order to elect Republicans and enact a conservative agenda. About a year after his hire, Freedom Foundation CEO, Tom McCabe said it best: **"When I got to the Freedom Foundation – it was about 13 months ago – I told my staff, 'we need to fight unions.' Because unions have corrupted our state, they have ensured that we're the bluest state in the country. And I told my staff, all these things we're fighting for, whether it's property rights, whether it's lower taxes, whether it's less government spending, whether it's agencies that are duplicating efforts – all of that stuff cannot be accomplished until the power of unions has been dissipated, until we reduce that power of the union, until frankly we defund it."**

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/aug/30/rightwing-alliance-unions-defund-defang>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/mar/10/union-killers-freedom-foundation>