

# When Unions Are Strong, Families Are Strong

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Republicans have staked out endless signature issues: shutting down the government, vilifying immigrants, denouncing rights like paid sick leave and equal pay because they are “women’s issues,” privatizing education, and—wait for it—obliterating the rights of working people to negotiate together for better wages and benefits that can sustain their families.

## When working people are supported, the economy is strengthened.

New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie recently said that our teachers union deserves a “punch in the face.” Fellow presidential longshot and Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker wants to nationalize his plan to destroy public sector unions. Yet unions are now more popular with Republicans than Christie and Walker are. That’s right, the latest polling shows that while Christie and Walker have negligible support among Republican voters (1.5 and 3 percent, respectively), a full 42 percent of Republicans support unions.

In fact, support for unions is increasing. Last month’s Gallup poll showed that in just one year, support for unions grew five points to nearly 60 percent. And according to the Brookings Institution, more than 50 percent of nonunion workers say that if an election was held in their workplace tomorrow, they would vote for union representation.

So why would a governor advance an agenda that both presses his finger on the scale of inequality against working people and places a dead weight on the economy, as it has in Wisconsin? Especially since we know that when working people are supported, as they’ve been in neighboring Minnesota, the economy is strengthened?

The same wealthy special interests and CEOs who back Walker’s policies and manipulate economic rules in their favor want to make it even harder for working people to come together, speak up and get ahead.

All across the country, though, people understand that unions are good for their families. Journalist Denis Hamill recently wrote about the sea change when his father’s factory was unionized: Workers’ terrible pay and working conditions improved immediately. Unioniza-

tion was a lifeline, lifting families out of tenements and into the middle class.

That’s still the case, as a new study from researchers at Harvard University, Wellesley College and the Center for American Progress shows. Children in areas with higher union membership have more economic mobility, and children in union households have better outcomes.

Unions also give women a leg up. According to a new report from the Institute for Women’s Policy Research, the wage gap between men and women narrows for union women, from 77 cents for women in general compared with every dollar a man earns, to 89 cents for union women. And a union contract makes an even bigger difference for women of color.

Unions like the American Federation of Teachers are strengthening our families, schools and economy—at the bargaining table, ballot box and beyond.

Take what we’re doing in McDowell County, W.Va.—the eighth-poorest county in the nation. Our union brought together public and private partners who have collectively invested more than \$16 million in the last four years. The county, which was built on the coal industry, is being transformed by things it never had before—like widespread broadband access, dental care and addiction treatment.

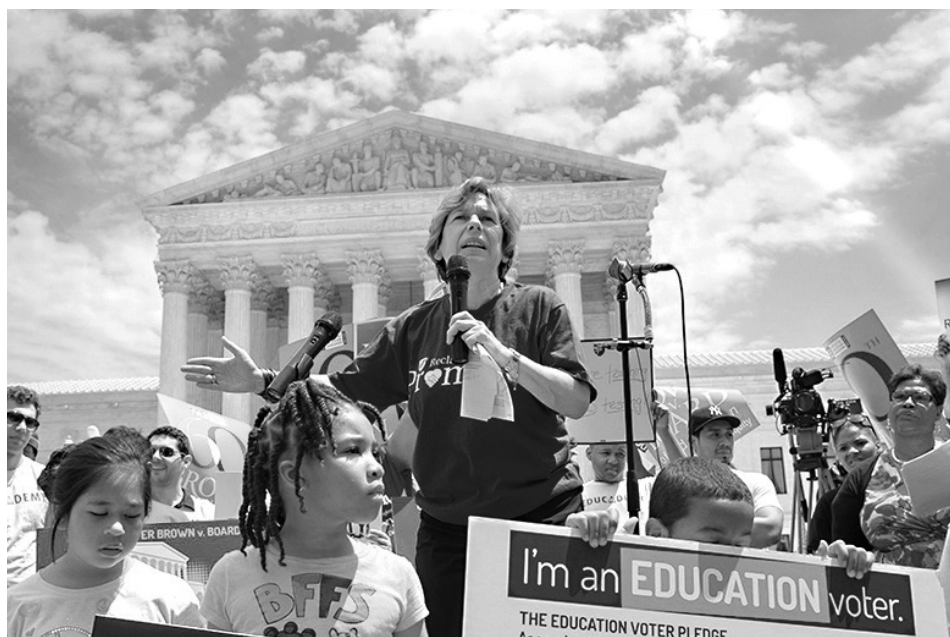
And in New York City, our union’s work in encouraging infrastructure investments by pension funds is creating jobs by helping to

finance the building of the new LaGuardia Airport. Five years ago, we made a commitment—through the Clinton Global Initiative with the AFL-CIO and the Building Trades—to invest \$10 billion of our members’ pension funds into infrastructure. We’ve already created tens of thousands of good jobs, and the LaGuardia project furthers this commitment.

Yet we are still the object of unrelenting attacks. Politicians like Christie and Walker, and the wealthy special interests that support their plans, want to eliminate unions because they see anything that helps working families get a bigger piece of the economic pie as eroding their power.

The U.S. Supreme Court case *Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association* is their latest tactic. Focused exclusively on public service workers—like teachers, nurses and firefighters—the case could undermine unions’ efforts to make our voices heard on issues that affect all of us: fighting for smaller class sizes, working so we can all retire with dignity, holding billionaires accountable for paying their fair share, and making sure employers understand we are working harder and harder just to get by.

Walker has said that the way to eliminate unions is to “divide and conquer.” But that’s not what Americans want. Hardworking Americans know that, as Hillary Clinton has said, “When unions are strong, families are strong. And when families are strong, America is strong.”



AFT President Randi Weingarten speaks about educational justice in front of the U.S. Supreme Court.

Michael Campbell

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