

# THE TRUTH ABOUT THE "FREEDOM" FOUNDATION'S LIES



The "Freedom" Foundation (aka Opt Out Today) is a far-right, anti-worker group based in Olympia, Washington, with a long history of lying to the public, union members, and the press about their activities. The "Freedom" Foundation has spent millions of dollars and years of staff time on a failed campaign to try to turn the "blue" states of Washington, Oregon, and California "red" by attacking working families. Below we have outlined just some of the lies of the "Freedom" Foundation/Opt Out Today.

## 1. THEIR LIE: THE "FREEDOM" FOUNDATION IS FIGHTING FOR AMERICAN WORKERS.

And now we have officially taken our mission national. Going forward, wherever workers' rights are threatened, whether it be at the national level like the PRO Act, or questionable activities in the states, the Freedom Foundation will be there to fight back for American workers.

The group has actively opposed measures that would benefit workers, such as raising the minimum wage, implementing paid sick leave, and increasing retirement security. Their founder helped write a "toolkit" on shrinking state governments by cutting employee pensions, raising the retirement age, health insurance costs, and delaying raises. Their claim of helping workers is propaganda meant to cover up their real motives.

**The Truth: The "Freedom" Foundation has been fighting aggressively against the well-being of working families.**

## 2. THEIR LIE: ALL OF THEIR FUNDING COMES FROM LOCAL DONORS AROUND THE NORTHWEST.

Staffer Max Nelsen told the Seattle Times, "*we get our funding entirely from voluntary contributions from donors around the Northwest.*" IRS 990s reveal that the "Freedom" Foundation has received enormous grants from far-right foundations located outside of the Northwest, including Pennsylvania's Sarah Scaife Foundation, South Carolina's Roe Foundation and Colorado's Adolph Coors Foundation. Wisconsin's Bradley Foundation has sent the group over \$3,000,000. The "Freedom" Foundation is not held up by local, grassroots support.

**The Truth: The "Freedom" Foundation relies on large donations from far-right, billionaire-foundations located in other parts of the country.**



### 3. THEIR LIE: “THE ‘FREEDOM’ FOUNDATION HAS A PROVEN PLAN FOR BANKRUPTING AND DEFEATING GOVERNMENT UNIONS THROUGH EDUCATION, LITIGATION, LEGISLATION AND COMMUNITY ACTIVATION.”

President Tom McCabe made this promise to donors in a 2015 newsletter. New Bureau of Labor statistics show that union membership grew by an astonishing 115,000 workers in Oregon and Washington just during 2021. Total union membership in the region is approaching 1,000,000 while nationally, union popularity is the highest it's been in 50 years. McCabe's ineffective plan was clearly not a “proven” one.

**The Truth: Union membership is surging precisely where the “Freedom” Foundation has focused its efforts longest - Washington and Oregon.**

### 4. THEIR LIE: THE “FREEDOM” FOUNDATION IS NOT TRYING TO INFLUENCE ELECTIONS.

political committee.<sup>5</sup> As a 501(c)(3) non-profit, the Foundation does not solicit donations for the purpose of electoral political activity, and donors to non-profits like the Foundation know that nothing will be spent for or against candidates on penalty of losing tax-exempt (and tax deductible) status.

They describe their mission in explicitly political terms in fundraising materials, even referencing upcoming elections. According to McCabe, their goal is to defund public sector unions in hopes of defunding Democrat politicians - to “replicate [Gov. Scott] Walker’s remarkable successes in Wisconsin...” which “became a swing state rather than a reliably leftist state like Washington.”

**The Truth: The “Freedom” Foundation attacks labor unions in order to win elections for right-wing candidates.**

### 5. THEIR LIE: THE “FREEDOM” FOUNDATION RECEIVES NO GOVERNMENT SUPPORT.

From humble beginnings with just two staff members and 341 supporters, the Freedom Foundation team has grown to include about 20 staff and over 5,000 volunteers and financial supporters. Every contribution to the Freedom Foundation is voluntary, we accept no government support.



The "Freedom" Foundation successfully asked the federal government for \$644,125 in 2020 as part of the Payroll Protection Program. The eventual payout, with interest, totaled \$651,157 and does not need to be paid back. They have removed the phrase "*we accept no government support*" from their website, but still claim to advance "*limited, accountable government.*" The "Freedom" Foundation receives generous support from American taxpayers, both through the PPP and the group's dubious non-profit tax status.

**The Truth: They have taken over \$600k in government support and pay no federal taxes on their income.**

## **6. THEIR LIE: "FREEDOM" FOUNDATION CANVASSERS SPOKE WITH "THOUSANDS" OF WORKERS DURING DECEMBER OF 2021.**

This included hundreds of thousands of mailers and e-mails, while Freedom Foundation canvassers spoke with thousands of public employees at their workplaces and homes.

They had two canvassers driving to government buildings on the East Coast in December, according to VP of Communications Ashley Varner, who wrote detailed notes about the trip. Multiple locations were closed due to Covid safety precautions. Her only photos of talking with workers showed a small group at one location. Mostly, the photos of the trip were selfies in front of quiet office buildings. She didn't mention anything about visiting workers' homes. Writing that they had spoken with "thousands" of workers on the trip is a bold lie, even by their standards.

**The Truth: The "Freedom" Foundation shamelessly invents numbers as it suits them.**

## **7. THEIR LIE: COVID-19 IS NOT A DANGER TO CHILDREN.**

The "Freedom" Foundation has repeatedly trivialized the safety of school children during the pandemic for partisan gain. Their claims that "*the virus doesn't present a serious danger to most children*" and "*barely one in 50 [children who are infected with Covid-19] will show any long-term symptoms*" came from a staff attorney with no medical training. In reality, millions of American children have been infected by the disease and over a thousand have died. We don't know yet what the long-term effects will be. The "Freedom" Foundation is using this despicable lie just to harass unionized educators.



**The Truth: Covid-19 has infected millions of American children with unknown long-term effects and killed over a thousand so far.**



## 8. THEIR LIE: COVID-19 IS NOT A “SERIOUS ISSUE” IN WASHINGTON

A “Freedom” Foundation attorney said, “I’ll tell you that in the state of Washington, this is not a serious issue. It hit a nursing home community and after that, there’s just not been a real pandemic.” The same attorney said that wearing facial masks to protect from the virus makes people look like “sheep.” Washington State has now seen 1.34 million people infected with the virus, over 10,000 of whom died.

**The Truth: The “Freedom” Foundation has invested heavily in denying the extent and lethality of the Covid-19 pandemic.**

## 9. THEIR LIE: THERE IS NO DANGER IN RELEASING PEOPLE’S PRIVATE INFORMATION TO THE PUBLIC.

The “Freedom” Foundation requests and stockpiles personal data about public employees in order to harass them about union membership through work email. They also cross-reference those names and birthdays to voter registrations, thereby obtaining home addresses as further targets. They claim there is no danger in releasing such information to them. They tell a very different story in regards to the personal information of “Freedom” Foundation funders: “...it’s also dangerous when you’re giving out people’s addresses and birthdays, that invites people to try to steal our identity or come to our home...it’s very very creepy...” This is clear, self-serving hypocrisy.

**The Truth: “Freedom” Foundation believes it is dangerous to release their funders’ private information, but argues the opposite for public employees.**

## 10. THEIR LIE: THE “FREEDOM” FOUNDATION DOESN’T CONTACT UNIONIZED FIRST RESPONDERS.

Director Aaron Withe told OPB they don’t contact first responders because those unions aren’t “overtly political.” The reporter had evidence contradicting that statement, including voicemails and emails provided by firefighters. Withe called those firefighters “dishonest” in response.

**The Truth: The “Freedom” Foundation harasses union members indiscriminately, even first responders during a societal crisis, and will lie when confronted about it.**