



Alaskans Working For Alaska!

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OP-ED

TITLE: Alaskans Should Be Free to Join Unions that Can Fix an Unfair Economy

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On Wednesday, the United States Supreme Court decided on a narrow 5-4 margin to side with the billionaires, CEOs and corporate interests behind the *Janus v. AFSCME Council 31* case to undermine the rights of workers across the country by making it harder for unions to organize.

Greedy special interests have rigged our economy and democracy against working people for little cost to their bottom line, they have groomed, funded and elected national and state legislators that support slashing government. In Alaska, public services has felt the impact of these attacks with health care costs increased, retirement programs eliminated and criminals set free and or no longer incarcerated. We have all seen the consequences of this in rising crime rates and lowered state services. Additionally, state workers have not had a pay raise in three years and must take unpaid days off every month. Alaska workers, all too often, work multiple jobs to make ends meet. Alaska faces staggering public safety and health problems, and it needs excellent state workers.

Guess what? The Court majority and their rich benefactors are in for a surprise.

Far from destroying us, anticipating the Court's decision has already made unions better advocates for Alaskan workers. The Alaska State Employees Association (ASEA/AFSCME Local 52) members, made up of almost 8,000 Alaska state and municipal public employees has been adapting, preparing and focusing on fighting for the rights, benefits and protections not only our members, but for all workers and their families, union and non-union. Our members are united, motivated, and ready to fight for the freedom to organize, the freedom to negotiate better wages and working conditions and the freedom to have the best advocates in the work place.

When nurses, firefighters, police officers, 911 dispatchers and probation and parole officers belong to unions, they fight for staffing levels, equipment and training that save lives and improves everyone's public safety. Last year, after years of hard work, members and families of the Public Safety Employees Association, Local 803 (PSEA) succeed in getting legislation passed that provides medical benefits to families of public safety employees killed in the line of

duty. This year, ASEA Local 52 union members, community partners, and mental health advocates successfully lobbied together to get additional staffing at Alaska Psychiatric Institute, so patients are better treated and staff can be safer in the work place.

When Alaska's union membership is high, our communities enjoy wages and benefits that represent a fair return on their work and greater social and economic mobility. Unions fight for these freedoms for everyone, and that's why they are the target of greedy special interests and are more critical to Alaska and America's success than ever. You don't need to be a union member to know that freedom is not given, it is fought for—and it must be protected. Like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s legacy of standing up for civil rights and labor rights, we're going to fix this rigged system once and for all. Our elected officials should stand with us, and work to make the fight to protect our freedoms easier, not harder.

