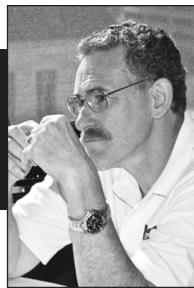


# Who's On Our Side?

By Tom Chamberlain



This April's U.S. Supreme Court decision striking down limits on the total amount of campaign contributions a person can make was a deliberate power shift from the middle class to the 1%ers. We've created a super-class of Americans who control more power and wield more influence than we've seen in 100 years.

You've heard this before. But I hope you'll keep reading, because it's possible that the Supreme Court is about to make it even worse, and you need to know what's coming.

There is no question that income inequity and its impact on the American family is entering a critical phase. Between 1991 and 2011, Oregon's median income dropped by approximately \$5,000.

According to Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist David Cay Johnston, real wages for the bottom 90 percent of American wage earners between 1966 and 2011 grew by \$59 per year. The average income growth for the top 10 percent over the same period of time was \$116,071 — and we know the bulk of that increase was in the top 0.1 percent. To put that into perspective: if you say a \$59 boost is equivalent to one inch, the incomes of the top 10 percent of Americans rose by 168 feet.

I can't think of an elected official who isn't talking about wage inequality. But while politicians wring their hands and talk in sound bites, AFSCME and the Service Employees (SEIU) have taken action by organizing low-wage workers.

Childcare and home health care workers provide essential services for society. They take care of our kids while parents work, and in-

crease the quality of life for the physically challenged and elderly. They are also very low-wage workers who have few, if any, benefits.

AFSCME and SEIU have empowered these workers, bargained higher wages, and sought health care and other benefits on their behalf. In 2000, 63 percent of Oregon voters amended the Oregon Constitution to create the Oregon Care Commission for the Elderly and Disabled, giving homecare workers the right to join a union and collectively bargain. Childcare workers were given similar rights in 2005. Tens of thousands of Oregon workers and their families are shrinking the wage gap thanks to these changes.

In 2013, California Gov. Brown signed into law the Domestic Workers Bill of Rights, giving thousands of domestic workers the right to join a union and collectively bargaining for the first time.

As union members, we must lift all workers up. Achieving collective power for workers who are exempt from the National Labor Relations Act through state laws is central to rebuilding the middle class.

This brings us back to the Supreme Court, where we are awaiting a decision on a case called *Harris v. Quinn*. The decision in this case could not only reverse the gains made for low-wage workers, but could upend public-sector unionism.

*Harris v. Quinn* is a constitutional challenge to the inclusion of state-paid homecare workers under Illinois' public sector collective bargaining laws. The case was brought by the National Right to Work Defense Foundation. The plaintiffs are

non-member homecare workers.

The plaintiffs argue that requiring all workers in the unit to be represented by a union and requiring non-members represented by a union to pay their fair share of the cost of representation is forced association, which is forbidden by the First Amendment.

The federal Court of Appeals in Chicago rejected this argument and upheld the law. Their ruling was based on a 1977 U.S. Supreme Court decision that rejected the First Amendment defense in a case regarding fair share fees in the public sector.

Worst case scenario: the U.S. Supreme Court overturns the 1977 decision and implements a free rider system that gives non-members the right to all the benefits of a union in the workplace without paying a dime. Even if the court doesn't go this far, a decision that focuses on home healthcare, childcare and domestic workers would reverse 15 years of hard-fought gains for low-wage workers.

Best case: the Court upholds the Court of Appeals decision, maintaining collective power for these workers.

A lot is at stake in this decision. Our Supreme Court has ruled in favor of corporations and against working people, but in this case we have strong precedent on our side. Some time in the next month, we'll know where the justices stand when it comes to putting workers ahead of corporate profits.

*Tom Chamberlain is president of the Oregon AFL-CIO.*

## Motorcycle poker run June 14; tickets to win a new Harley Davidson motorcycle still available

The 12th annual Unions for Kids Motorcycle Poker Run & Chili Cook-off will be held Saturday, June 14, starting at 9 a.m.

Unions for Kids is a nonprofit, all-volunteer organization established in 2003 by union members and supporters to raise money for Doernbecher Children's Hospital. One hundred percent of the proceeds from its events go to that cause. To date, \$390,000 has been donated.

Most of the money is raised through a raffle to win a Harley Davidson Softail Classic motorcycle valued at \$21,569. Tickets are \$10 each, with only 5,000 tickets sold.

The 75-mile motorcycle poker run starts and finishes at the IBEW Local 48 Hall, 15937 NE Airport Way, Portland. Registration is from 8:30 to 10 a.m. All poker hands must be returned by 2:45 p.m. to be eligible to win cash prizes.

The event also features vendors, raffle prizes a silent auction, and chili cook-off competition.

The drawing for the motorcycle will be held at 4 p.m.

Unions for Kids president Lee Duncan said Hampton Inn, 3039 NE 181st Ave., Portland, is offering a discounted room rates for participants. The phone number is 503-669-7000.

For more information about Unions for Kids, the Poker Run, or to purchase a Harley motorcycle raffle ticket, visit [www.unionsforkids.org](http://www.unionsforkids.org), or call Duncan at 503-260-5905.

Harley Davidson motorcycle raffle tickets can be purchased at the following locations:

**IBEW & United Workers Federal Credit Union**, 9955 SE Washington St., Portland; **Teamsters Council 37 Federal Credit Union**, 1866 NE 162nd Ave., Portland; **Bounty Hunter Saloon**, 11445 SW Pacific Hwy., Tigard; **Midnight Roundup Saloon**, 345 NW Burnside, Gresham; **Gateway Pub**, 39100 Pioneer, Sandy; **Dita's Chocolates**, 38915 Proctor Blvd., Sandy; and **Wooden Chicken Pub**, 12500 NE Sandy Blvd., Portland.

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