



In Janus, A National Reexamination of Government Unions

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On Monday, February 26, the U.S. Supreme Court heard oral arguments for [Janus v. American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees, Council 31](#), dealing with whether government unions can require fees from non-members as a condition to public employment. If ruled in the plaintiff's favor, the *Janus* case [would have more of an impact in about 22 other states](#) than in Missouri, where agency fees in the government sector are not really permitted by law.

That isn't to say the issue doesn't crop up from time to time. In 2013 non-union officers in Kansas City [had their employment threatened by the union when they refused to cough up money for the union's activities](#). And while that incident is an exception to the Missouri rule, it's an episode that supporters of good government in Missouri have to keep in mind as they survey the policy landscape post-*Janus*.

Indeed, *Janus* brings with it the opportunity to reassess public policies that generally provide considerable latitude to government unions. [Most states have a laws on the subject that are literally to the left of Franklin Delano Roosevelt](#), since Roosevelt himself was highly skeptical of collective bargaining and traditional unionization among government workers. Not only does the risk persist that a union could elect members into government to negotiate them sweetheart contracts, but the prospect of a company's failure that faces private labor negotiations hardly ever truly attaches to a government agency—if economic conditions go sideways, taxes can be

raised, services can be reduced, or some combination of the two could take place to protect the government union's interests.

Point being, government unions have been given a wide berth to operate over the last half-century, and it is overdue that the latitude they've been granted was reviewed—in light not only of the law and the Constitution, as will happen in *Janus*, but of good policy as well. Government union members, non-union government employees, and taxpayers certainly [deserve better than the status quo](#).

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Patrick Ishmael is the director of government accountability at the Show-Me Institute.

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