

Karen Schanfield's UMN 2021 Regent Candidacy

Karen Schanfield is a well-connected semi-retired attorney and former shareholder at [Fredrikson and Byron](#). She “advises and represents employers on a broad range of workplace matters.” While Karen Schanfield presents herself as pro-labor, her lucrative legal career is built on mediation, arbitration, and litigation *on behalf of employers, not employees*. She played the leading role in busting the faculty unionization campaign at University of Minnesota-Twin Cities (UMN-TC) in 2014-2018.

In the last few decades, as funding for higher education has been slashed, universities have hired more and more high-priced executive administrators, who have turned college into big business. They have dramatically increased tuition, cut tenure-track positions, and lowered faculty pay. [“Contingent” \(or non-tenure-track\) faculty now teach more than two-thirds of university courses nationwide, and many of them are living on the edge of poverty](#). In the last few years, unionization of contingent faculty has brought critical improvements to their working conditions, job stability, and student learning conditions.

Contingent faculty at UMN-TC work in a state of precarity, where they are significantly lower paid than tenure-track faculty, even when teaching the same classes, and have highly unstable employment. Meanwhile, UMN-TC, following the business plan of other universities, continues to shift its faculty numbers towards contingent faculty. To address these problems, contingent faculty sought to unionize with SEIU in 2014, inspired by [SEIU's successful faculty unionizations](#) across the country, including here in Minnesota at Hamline University, Augsburg College, and MCAD. These faculty and SEIU discovered, however, that the U had placed contingent faculty positions in a different bargaining unit-- the “Academic Professional & Administrative Staff” Unit 11)-- than with tenure-track faculty in the “Instructional Unit” 8. The nature of Unit 11, a catch-all grouping of 4500+ employees with 27+ job categories (including coaches and the president of the university) makes it nearly impossible to unionize, including for other groups in the unit like post-docs and advisors who have successfully unionized at many other universities.

In order to overcome this obstacle, and because tenure-track faculty recognized the fate of their profession was tied to the fate of their contingent colleagues, both contingent and tenure-track faculty organized together, signing union cards that triggered a union election process, and sought to re-assign contingent faculty to the instructional unit 8. The state Bureau of Mediation Services (BMS), after extensive hearings, agreed (BMS Case No. 16PCE0644). During these hearings, in order to prevent the reassignment, Karen Schanfield's fundamental angle of attack was a 2-pronged argument that (1) that contingent faculty were so much less elite than their tenure-track colleagues that they did not belong in the same unit as them, and (2) that the teaching mission of UMN-TC that now mostly rests with contingent faculty was not as important as the research mission, and should not be corrupted by placing the faculty who teach and the faculty who do research together.

This latter point angered and disgusted many tenure-track faculty who see teaching as core to their work and often choose to work at a public university because of how much they value the teaching mission. Such combined units are also the norm throughout public higher education, including at UMN-Duluth and UMN-Crookston, where contingent and tenure-line faculty

Karen Schanfield's UMN 2021 Regent Candidacy

negotiate together in one union. Schanfield also treated contingent faculty during these hearings in a deeply disrespectful manner, questioning the careers and qualifications of some of the most decorated and dedicated teaching faculty at the U, while praising and lionizing tenure-track faculty. This divisive tactic has left a bad taste in the mouths of many of the 2,700 faculty who were unionizing, and explains [the many signatures against her regent candidacy](#). Schanfield then led [the appeal](#) that successfully reversed this BMS order.

Testimonials:

"I have taught at the U for over 20 years, and many of us were deeply offended and hurt by how Karen Schanfield attacked contingent faculty during the BMS hearings, going through people's CVs line-by-line to make them feel like the work and teaching they did was inferior, and then heaping praise on my tenured colleagues who I was organizing alongside." --Mary Pogatshnik, Contingent Faculty, Spanish & Portuguese

"I joined the 2015 effort to unionize faculty on the Twin Cities campus, believing that a union would build rights claims for people like myself - a then-untured woman of color. Karen Schanfield was on the other side, as a senior white lawyer in a firm hired to quash our effort. She is not a worthy regent for a public university. If anything, she has shown a willingness to undercut the educational mission funded by our tax dollars." --Sonali Pahwa, Associate Professor, Theater Arts and Dance, UMN-TC

"Contract faculty like Teaching Specialists and Lecturers teach many of the same classes, participate in faculty governance, and engage in service and research. While we have different roles at the University, we are all responsible for teaching our students and making the U a great place to learn." --Jerry Cohen, Professor, Horticultural Science

"Students support the effort of contingent faculty to form a union with tenured faculty on campus because contingent instructors are who we see most often as undergrads and their lack of stability affects our education. When instructors don't know if they will be teaching the following semester, it affects the continuity of a degree program, and when they have to work multiple jobs to make ends meet for themselves and their families, we see that in the classroom." --Mica Standing Soldier, previous undergraduate Senior in English and Creative Writing

"As the University's administration has increased the number and ratio of non-tenure-line positions, the fates of all faculty are increasingly intertwined. We believe that the precarious working conditions under which contingent faculty labor are not only bad for them but also bad for students and bad for us, the remaining tenure-line faculty." --Irene Duranczyk, an Associate Professor in the College of Education and Human Development.