



THE LAWSUIT LOBBY

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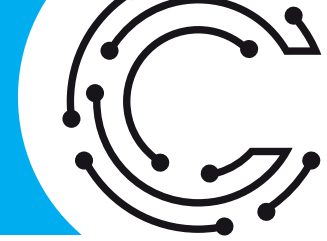
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BIDEN AND ACTIVIST ALLIES PUSH TAXPAYER-FUNDED VOTER REGISTRATION ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES

By Hayden Ludwig

In the run up to the 2022 midterm elections, professional activists were desperate to drive up voter registration rates everywhere they could, particularly on college campuses. And they wanted taxpayers to fund it, too.

One-Two Punch

Earlier this year, President Joe Biden's Department of Education instructed universities that they must engage in voter registration campaigns in order to receive further federal student aid grants, a major source of revenue for higher education institutions. That includes using Federal Work-Study funds—monies meant to encourage part-time campus jobs to help cover tuition—to pay students who register their classmates, both on and off campus.

Add to that the activists at ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge, which rewards faculty and students for launching registration and “voter education” efforts at their schools in order to boost “participation in American democracy.” To date, ALL IN has targeted hundreds of universities for mass registration drives.

ALL IN—like all nonprofit groups—is legally nonpartisan, meaning it isn't aligned with either political party. But it boasts about its “theory of change,” which aims to achieve a “more representative American democracy” through “civic learning,” “political engagement,” and “voter participation”—fuzzy buzzwords that translate to greater Democratic Party turnout and political power.

Overtly Partisan

One member, Florida's Miami Dade College, posted a “2022 Democratic Engagement Action Plan” on ALL IN's website detailing how it plans to pay students to register their peers. Partial funding came from the New Jersey-



Miami Dade College's North Campus Science Complex.

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based Andrew Goodman Foundation, which funds “social justice initiatives” and boasts about its “plan to mobilize the youth vote in the 2022 midterm elections.”

The Goodman Foundation even offered to directly employ six paid Miami Dade College interns working weekly to register new college voters, using \$1,000 stipends and \$500 “in funding for voter engagement activities.”

The college plans include sending faculty-wide emails “with [a] clear message re: voter registration and voter education” and voting locally, as opposed to voting in students' home states. The college even invited activists from the far-left group Engage Miami to make “nonpartisan voter engagement presentations” in classrooms.

“Nonpartisan” is pushing it for a self-described coalition of “Gen Z, millennials, Black, Latinx, Indigenous, immi-

Hayden Ludwig is a senior research analyst at CRC.

grants, women, men, queer, trans, and nonbinary” activists that offers a partisan voting guide that endorses Democrats in the 2022 midterm elections.

Civic Nation

ALL IN is itself a front for Civic Nation, a “progressive” activist hub that runs similar initiatives such as the feminist United State of Women and Michelle Obama’s voter registration group When We All Vote. Civic Nation is listed as one of the groups working to boost turnout among women, ex-felons, and “lawfully present noncitizen New Yorkers” to create a “more just and equitable democracy” in New York.

We’ve traced grants to Civic Nation from Pierre Omidyar’s Democracy Fund, the Carnegie Corporation (a foundation despite its name), Environmental Defense Fund, and the Joyce Foundation, which once included then-Sen. Barack Obama (D-IL) on its board.

Civic Nation’s board is dominated by ex-Obama administration officials, including senior advisor Valerie Jarrett; Tina Tchen, who tried to discredit accusations of sexual harassment against New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo in 2021; and Cecilia Muñoz, who now advises the liberal think tank New America.

An Elections Takeover

Almost from the day President Biden was sworn into office, partisan operatives urged him to order federal agencies to conduct massive voter registration campaigns targeting “Black and brown” and “low-income Americans.”

Demos, the far-left think tank leading the campaign, calls “integrating voter registration into routine [government] transactions” a “vital step towards dismantling white supremacy in our democracy and building a more representative government.”

Description of Work/Timeline 2022 Election Cycle

(includes August 23 primary election, and November 8 midterm election)

Activity	Description	Comments	Timeline
Paid Voter Engagement Interns	Paid for via external partnerships, non-partisan voter engagement/voter education/voter registration internships	Will have at least 35 MDC students working as paid voter engagement interns this fall covering all 8 campuses	All interns to be hired and trained over the summer and early fall
• Andrew Goodman Foundation Vote Everywhere Ambassadors	https://andrewgoodman.org/vote-everywhere/ 6 paid interns working year-round –10 hours a week commitment (2 each at Kendall, Wolfson, and North campuses).	Each student receives \$1000 stipend, receives training and on-going support, and has \$500 in funding for voter engagement activities.	
• Engage Miami	~10 MDC student interns will be hired for the fall term –10 hours a week.	\$500 stipend.	
• Civic Influencers	Interns (approximately 20 positions), hired by August, spread among the 8 campuses – 10 hours a week commitment.	Each MDC student intern will receive cash stipend of \$500-\$750.	
• Campus Vote Project	Interns (exact allocation TBD), hired by August, spread among the 8 campuses – 10 hours a week commitment.	Each MDC student intern will receive cash stipend, summer – December 1.	

Screencap of Miami-Dade voter registration information. Credit: Miami-Dade County, Florida.



The U.S. Constitution is clear that the states, not the federal government, are responsible for running elections.

They succeeded in March 2021, when Biden signed Executive Order 14019, directing all federal departments and agencies to “protect and promote the right to vote, eliminate discrimination and other barriers to voting, and expand access to voter registration and accurate election information.”

The U.S. Constitution is clear that the states, not the federal government, are responsible for running elections. States have offered easy registration services for decades, and 2020 saw the highest turnout in U.S. history—158 million voters.

Partisan operatives, however, believe that Democratic victories rely on ever-higher turnout, which is why liberal voter registration nonprofits spent \$434 million in 2020 *alone* and Congressional Democrats included automatic voter registration in their For the People Act (H.R. 1) last year.

The goal is to make “citizen” synonymous with “registered voter,” freeing leftists to concentrate on getting out the vote.

Ned Jones, deputy director for the Conservative Partnership Institute’s Election Integrity Network, sees the Biden order as a clear partisan takeover of America’s elections.

“It’s wrong for federal agencies to use our tax dollars to engage in political campaign activities, run by left-wing organizations who target groups and areas with a high propensity to vote for Democrats,” he told Capital Research Center. “This administration is using our tax dollars to try to permanently skew elections to protect their political power.”

Is this the start of a dark new era in American history or a sign of desperation from a failing ideology? Only time—and a few more election cycles—will tell. ■

Read previous articles from the Commentary series online at <https://capitalresearch.org/category/commentary/>.



THE LEFT'S VOTING MACHINE

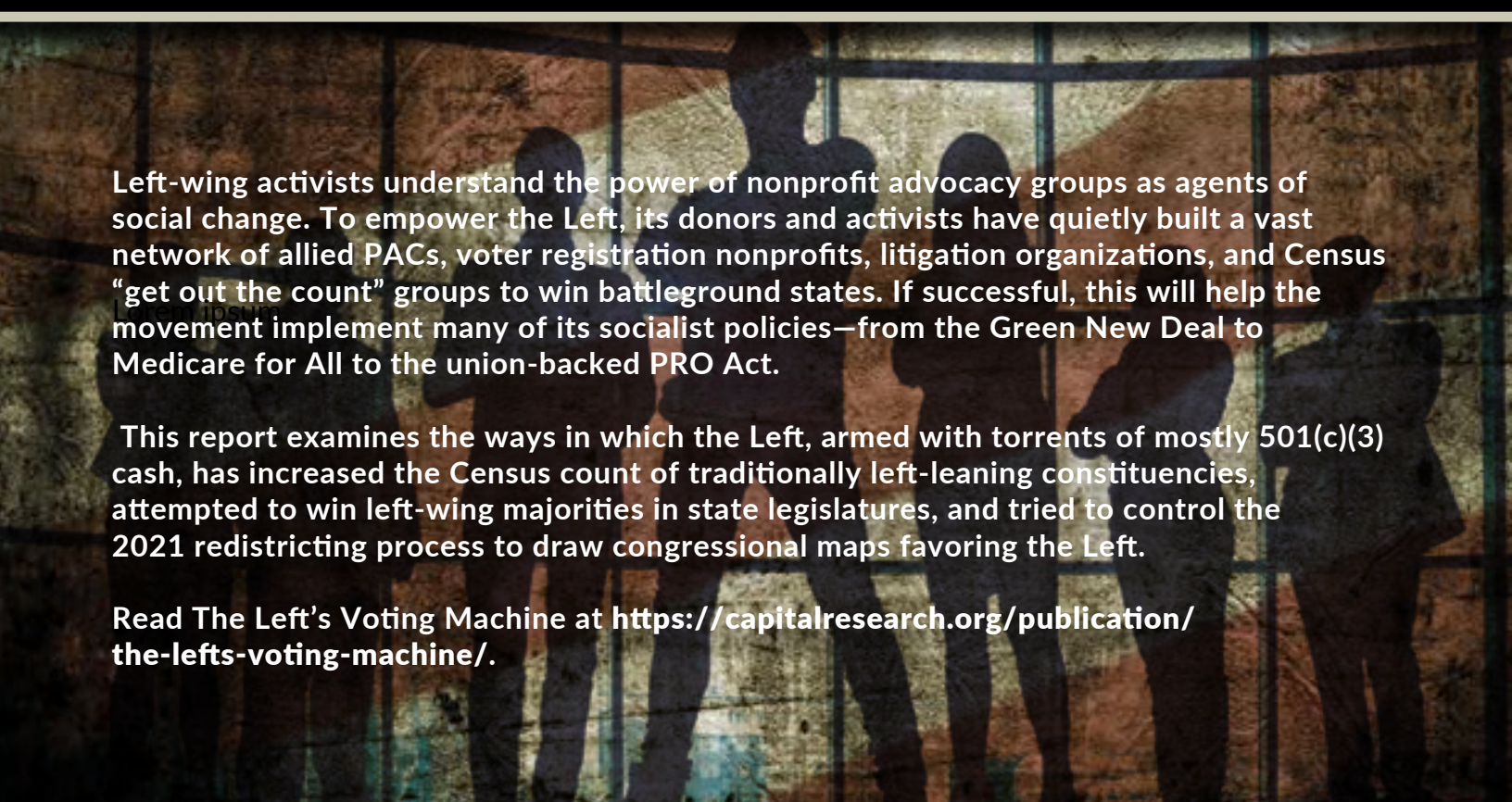


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Left-wing activists understand the power of nonprofit advocacy groups as agents of social change. To empower the Left, its donors and activists have quietly built a vast network of allied PACs, voter registration nonprofits, litigation organizations, and Census “get out the count” groups to win battleground states. If successful, this will help the movement implement many of its socialist policies—from the Green New Deal to Medicare for All to the union-backed PRO Act.

This report examines the ways in which the Left, armed with torrents of mostly 501(c)(3) cash, has increased the Census count of traditionally left-leaning constituencies, attempted to win left-wing majorities in state legislatures, and tried to control the 2021 redistricting process to draw congressional maps favoring the Left.

Read *The Left's Voting Machine* at <https://capitalresearch.org/publication/the-lefts-voting-machine/>.





CORRUPTION IN THE LABOR MOVEMENT: FROM WISEGUYS ON THE WATERFRONT TO “FAT, DUMB, AND HAPPY” AND BEYOND

By Michael Watson

Summary: *Corruption by labor union officials, whether in service to themselves, political allies, or organized crime syndicates, has been a fixture of American labor history since the labor movement first began to organize in the late 19th century. While the extent of criminal influence in organized labor has declined thanks to extensive federal law enforcement activity and judicial oversight, major corruption scandals continue to dog the union movement. From the recent kickback scheme at the United Auto Workers to the downfall of Philadelphia union boss and political fixer Johnny Doc Dougherty to the confession of former Teamsters boss John Coli, who was well connected to Chicago politicians, systemic corruption persists.*

Corruption in American organized labor is nearly as old as formal labor unions in the United States. Most historians of labor corruption agree that employers had much to do in starting it: By hiring their own toughs to break strikes in the late 19th and early 20th century, employers induced labor organizers to go looking for their own bands of toughs. And the toughs the workingmen found were in many cases classic “wiseguys”—that is, Mafiosi.

What started as a marriage of emergency became metastatic cancer. The enforcers discovered that the real money was not in doing organized labor’s dirty work but in running the labor unions themselves. Backed by government-granted powers and close connections with government officials in places like the New York metropolitan area, the opportunities for graft schemes legal and illegal and multi-million-dollar rackets were nearly limitless.

By the 1950s, Mafia domination and common thievery were so common among America’s labor statesmen that the U.S. Senate convened multiple investigative committees to determine the extent of corruption in the labor movement. These investigations jump-started the careers of a young senator from Massachusetts and his Senate-staffer brother, both surnamed Kennedy. The investigations revealed that America’s largest labor union at the time, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, was led by one crook, Dave Beck, who would be replaced during the hearings by another, the infamous Jimmy Hoffa



Credit: LightField Studios. License: Shutterstock.

By the 1950s, Mafia domination and common thievery were so common among America’s labor statesmen that the U.S. Senate convened multiple investigative committees to determine the extent of corruption in the labor movement.

(whom readers may remember as a character in Netflix’s *The Irishman*).

Congress responded by passing the Labor-Management Reporting and Disclosure Act—federal legislation designed to expose labor racketeering—but the rackets continued to pass cold, hard cash from workers’ wages and benefit funds into the hands of the made men. Mafia control of major international labor unions—most prominently the Teamsters and Laborers—was not ultimately broken until the Mafia itself was challenged by a change in federal criminal justice priorities: The post-J. Edgar Hoover FBI aggressively investigated the Mob. Bipartisan majorities in Congress passed expansive laws against organized crime, culminating in the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act (RICO). And federal prosecutors

Michael Watson is Capital Research Center’s research director and managing editor for InfluenceWatch.



Sometimes, the union boss is little more than a common thief, stealing union resources or taking bribes from employers for his own personal benefit.

engaged in creative lawfare against Mob-tied institutions. The most prominent was then-U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York Rudolph Giuliani, whose civil RICO action against the Teamsters Union ended the Mafia domination of that union, at least at the international headquarters level.

But throwing the book at old-fashioned wiseguys only crimped one form—admittedly a major form—of organized labor corruption. America’s labor unions still provide the common thieves who have led some of them with ample opportunities to embezzle, taking workers’ dues and pension contributions for personal luxuries. Dirty employers or their corrupt agents continue to offer kickbacks to keep the labor bosses commissioned by the federal exclusive monopoly bargaining privilege to negotiate on behalf of their workers “fat, dumb, and happy.” Union bosses closely tied to Democratic political machines have been implicated in public corruption in Philadelphia and Illinois. While international unions are cleaner than they were in Hoffa’s day, rooting Mafiosi out of local labor unions has been more difficult, with federal prosecutors charging Columbo Family brass with extorting a labor union official just last year.

The Structure of Labor Rackets

Corruption in organized labor can be analyzed in two ways: by the beneficiaries and aims of a corrupt scheme and by the corrupt practices in which the corrupted union officials engage. There are three broad categories of schemes and any number of practices in which a corrupted union can engage.

Sometimes, the union boss is little more than a common thief, stealing union resources or taking bribes from employers for his own personal benefit. Other union officials seeking power and influence cross the line from legal influence to bribery and other forms of political corruption or engage in violence and intimidation to achieve an otherwise legitimate union aim. The final class may be the best known, having been immortalized on the silver screen and American legend: the subordination of a labor union to organized crime, as depicted in the Marlon Brando

classic *On the Waterfront* and the more recent Netflix feature *The Irishman*.

Whatever the motive, the methods of improperly extracting funds or influence from a labor union are similar. Sometimes, the methods are technically legal: bloated salaries and multiple-officeholding by union bosses were characterized as “a kind of legalized graft” by James Jacobs, an academic scholar of labor racketeering.

Crossing the line into crime, sometimes the union officer just embezzles union funds or functions as an accomplice to a thieving superior by helping cover up the thefts. Former Washington Teachers Union president Barbara Bullock and two aides were convicted for a turn-of-the-21st-century scheme in which they bilked the union treasury for \$5 million in funds they used to buy household luxuries and pay for personal services over seven years.

Thieves in union officer jobs have included Jimmy Hoffa’s Teamsters Union predecessor (and onetime “Republicans’ Labor Statesman”) Dave Beck, whom congressional investigators accused of using a labor-management consultant as a cut-out who would purchase personal luxuries for Beck with his supposed consulting fees. Ricky Freeman was a former SEIU local leader convicted of embezzlement for taking union funds for “elaborate personal expenses” including a wedding in Hawaii. Then there are the many names on the roll of dishonor that is the Department of Labor Office of Labor-Management Standards list of criminal enforcement actions.

The form of union corruption that even trade unionists will admit is a serious problem is the corruption of the union management by employer kickbacks. A corrupt employer can, to quote the indictment of former Fiat Chrysler executive Al Iacobelli, keep the union officials “fat, dumb, and happy” with bribes or other perks, giving the employer a more favorable negotiation while rank-and-file union members are none the wiser.

But sometimes, the employer is not *only* the perpetrator, especially when the union has been corrupted by organized crime. The classical “labor peace” racket loosely follows the form “nice business you have there, shame if my union were to strike it,” with the wiseguy union man expecting a



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*A final form of labor racketeering that deserves mention is the hiring-hall or shape-up racket, depicted in Marlon Brando's Oscar-winning *On the Waterfront*.*

payoff. The federal government suspected officials with the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE), a successor union to the famed International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU), ran a racket on this model on behalf of various New York City-based organized crime families. In these schemes, employers are corrupted as well. In his history of corruption in organized labor *Solidarity for Sale*, left-wing journalist Robert Fitch reported that sources within the garment unions told him that the unions were not enforcing job-site safety agreements and minimum-wage requirements in exchange for bribes.

Running alongside mob-controlled unions are various forms of employer-cartel influence. Jacobs describes three: The mob could establish an employer cartel (and police it with other racketeering activities) to ensure businesses co-operated with the mob-influenced unions. The mob could create its own principal business within the cartelized industry, which it could then advantage by manipulating its union status. Or the mob could direct employers to do business with mob-controlled suppliers, with the supply contracts enforced by racketeering activity, such as labor peace extortion.

A final form of labor racketeering that deserves mention is the hiring-hall or shape-up racket, depicted in Brando's Oscar-winning *On the Waterfront*. Through its control of job referrals (typically through a hiring hall, though the old longshore unions depicted in the film used the on-site "shape-up"), the corrupted union takes kickbacks from and

exercises control over the unionized workers themselves. Critics of the corrupt leadership are sidelined, and corrupt business agents exclude from work union members who refuse to grease palms. In the June 2010 edition of Capital Research Center's Labor Watch, Robert VerBruggen listed a number of examples of hiring-hall racket busts in the construction industry, which uses the hiring hall widely.

Enabling the union racket is the structure of American labor law, a point both right-leaning and left-wing observers of union corruption concede. Exclusive monopoly representation in enterprise bargaining—under which a single (exclusive) trade union negotiates for all employees, union members and not (monopoly representation)—at a single workplace or firm (enterprise bargaining) is uncommon in an international comparison, as is widespread American-style union corruption. Monopoly representation prevents competition among labor organizations (or individual representation) and in non-right-to-work states secures forced payment of fees from non-union-members. Enterprise bargaining makes the employer both a potential target for labor peace extortion and a potential co-conspirator in a contract-avoidance racket or negotiation kickback scheme.

Not coincidentally, economic choke points, especially goods transportation in trucking and shipping, have had some of the most historically corrupt unions. The ability to shut off economic activity creates numerous opportunities for extortion, and the proliferation of small enterprises allows other racketeering tactics to proliferate.

A New Cast of Thieves: Kickbacks at Chrysler and Embezzlement at the UAW

What is likely the largest federal union corruption investigation since the 1990s centered on a kickback scheme run through a joint union-management training center. Fiat Chrysler executives and agents would approve the use of training center funds to benefit United Auto Workers officials. In its corporate guilty plea, Fiat Chrysler admitted to paying over \$3.5 million in total bribes to UAW brass.

The scheme began no later than 2009, as the Obama administration engineered a merger between Italian car-maker Fiat and the financially distressed, UAW-unionized Detroit stalwart Chrysler. (The merger, which saw the federal government bypass the normal bankruptcy process and give preference to the UAW's pension fund while issuing a multi-billion-dollar bailout, was detailed by Tim Carney in the July 2010 edition of Capital Research Center's Labor Watch.) As that was going on in Washington, executives



What is likely the largest federal union corruption investigation since the 1990s centered on a kickback scheme run through a joint union-management training center.

of the now Fiat Chrysler Automobiles (FCA) were cooking up a scheme in Michigan to keep the UAW's top brass "fat, dumb, and happy," to quote the indictment of ex-Fiat Chrysler executive Al Iacobelli.

Iacobelli and his UAW negotiating counterpart, General Holiefield—who escaped prosecution by dying of natural causes in 2015—funneled money from Fiat Chrysler into a joint union-management training center that was intended to provide support to union members and then just stole it. Like the Washington Teachers Union crooks from the previous decade, they splurged on personal luxuries: Iacobelli bought himself luxury fountain pens and a Ferrari with a six-figure price tag using cash swindled from the training center. Holiefield and his wife—who was busted by the feds for dodging taxes on the couple's ill-gotten gains—had a \$262,000 mortgage paid off by kickback funds. Holiefield and Iacobelli also used the training center to hire Holiefield's wife's companies, an arrangement that earned a warning from then-UAW international president Bob King, about whom prosecutors said, "The UAW president warned Holiefield and Iacobelli that paying Monica Morgan was a bad idea and that they could 'go to jail.'"

King's successors, Dennis Williams and Gary Jones, were less scrupulous. Both would go to federal prison for embezzlement schemes uncovered during the investigation into the Fiat Chrysler kickback arrangements. Both men and several other high-ranking UAW officials had raided union funds to pay for vacations and other personal luxuries. Federal prosecutors highlighted the schemers' use of stolen funds to pay for golf clubs and equipment and \$60,000 in cigars.

The scandal, which as of writing has led to at least 17 convictions of UAW officials and FCA management representatives, federal oversight of and organizational reform within the union, and a corporate guilty plea by and \$30 million fine against Fiat Chrysler, is a capstone of the downfall of what was once America's "clean" union. In the 1950s, Republicans led by Sen. Barry Goldwater (R-AZ)



Credit: AFSC. Public domain.

Walter Reuther was a strong anti-Communist in the Cold War, but also an admirer of Scandinavian socialism, who sought to use the million-plus-member UAW as a force to build an American welfare state.

sought to pin corruption or union violence on left-wing UAW leader Walter Reuther, but they couldn't. Goldwater was reduced to attacking Reuther's socialist politics: "I would rather have Hoffa stealing my money . . . than Reuther stealing my freedom."

Michael Barone, who lived in Detroit during Reuther's and the UAW's heyday, has written:

Walter Reuther and the UAW were far from uncontroversial half a century ago. Reuther was a visionary liberal, a supporter of civil rights when other labor leaders like the AFL-CIO's president George Meany was skittish. Reuther was a strong anti-Communist in the Cold War, but also an admirer of Scandinavian socialism, who sought to use the million-plus-member UAW as a force to build an American welfare state. Reuther was also an austere man who limited UAW officers' and staffers' salaries and perquisites far below those of many other unions, including the Teamsters headed by his Detroit-based rival Jimmy Hoffa.

Reuther was often attacked by Republicans, including Richard Nixon, Barry Goldwater and George Romney. But he was never accused of self-enrichment or taking bribes. . . .

Walter Reuther . . . worked hard to create an anti-corruption culture in the UAW, one which

continued to prevail under his two successors as union president. Its apparent breakdown, in my view, has elements of tragedy.

Reuther's austerity and probity have left the UAW's headquarters, even if his loyalty to the Democratic Party persists.



Before 2019, John "Johnny Doc" Dougherty Jr., the longtime business manager of International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 98, was one of the most powerful men in Pennsylvania.

Philly's Labor Fixer Crosses the Line

Before 2019, John "Johnny Doc" Dougherty Jr., the longtime business manager of International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 98, was one of the most powerful men in Pennsylvania. From 2000 through 2014, his union spent \$25.6 million on political campaigns, even more than the state teachers union. Dougherty's brother Kevin was elected to the state Supreme Court in 2015 with \$1.5 million in help from Johnny Doc's union on a slate that flipped the body to Democratic control. And power in Pennsylvania is power to deliver national majorities: The state delivered Joe Biden his 269th electoral vote of 270 needed to win in 2020.

But power corrupts, and Johnny Doc was corrupted. In their 2019 indictment, federal prosecutors alleged that the labor boss and political fixer had participated in an embezzlement scheme amounting to over \$600,000, and that his relationship with then-City Councilman Bobby Henon (D) had turned from legal influencing into outright bribery.

Start with Johnny Doc's influence over and through Henon, offenses for which a jury has already convicted both men. Henon was proud of his associations with Johnny Doc and IBEW Local 98. Local media noted that the former Local 98 political director called *himself* "John's Boy." After he was elected to city council, Johnny Doc kept Henon on the Local 98 payroll, paying him \$70,000 per year.

The feds argued that this was a no-show job that operated as a simple bribe. Henon reportedly allowed Dougherty to issue demands that Comcast, which needed approval from a committee chaired by Henon for a major project, use a contractor preferred by Dougherty. That contractor pled guilty to providing Dougherty with \$57,000 in free home and office renovations. Henon provided personal favors to Dougherty as well. The Wall Street Journal noted:

Another [criminal count] involves what happened after a towing company hauled away Mr. Dougherty's car. The union boss raged about the incident to Mr. Henon, and the city councilman had his staff draft a resolution to hold hearings to investigate the towing company.

While the jury agreed with federal prosecutors that these schemes amounted to bribery and fraud, Dougherty had a different view. After his conviction, Johnny Doc told the press:

What Councilman Henon and I were found guilty of is how business and politics are typically and properly conducted. I will immediately appeal and have every confidence that I will prevail in the Third Circuit Court of Appeals.

The scary thing is, he may not be entirely wrong, at least in a moral sense. Compared to the millions in legal campaign contributions he handed out to Pennsylvania Democrats, how much did \$70,000 per annum for a no-show job actually "buy"? And "prevailing wage" laws and "project labor agreements" are structured to ensure unions' preferred contractors get government and even major private projects. Pennsylvania free-market activist Matthew Brouillette argued that Dougherty's "tactics have ranged from ques-



Despite having once boasted that “You can cut my fingers off, I wouldn’t talk,” Coli pled guilty in 2019 and turned cooperating witness.

tionable to illegal” and that he has “long been recognized as behind efforts to harass and intimidate builders who opt for non-union labor.”

But Dougherty is not just charged with using Henon to get what he wanted from city council. The feds have also charged the union boss with stealing \$600,000 from the union in cahoots with other Local 98 officials. Local news website Billy Penn identified prosecutors as claiming Doc’s Union Pub and a multiuse residence in Philadelphia’s Pennsport neighborhood as having been renovated with embezzled funds. In 2021, federal prosecutors added additional charges, alleging that Johnny Doc had threatened a contractor that employed his nephew with labor trouble if it did not pay his nephew for full-time work—work for which his nephew was “a frequent no-show,” according to federal prosecutors as reported by Billy Penn.

Justice may be coming for Johnny Doc. He continues to assert his innocence and has expressed an intent to appeal his convictions as he awaits trial on the other charges. But the legacy of the political machine he built out of Local 98 will be with Pennsylvanians for some time.

Teamsters Traditions in the Windy City

Illinois wanted to build a high-flying film and television industry, and Alex Pissios wanted to be a part of it. But he needed some help to get the capital—millions in state grants and various tax breaks—to start his new studio, called Cinespace. He got the state benefits with the help of Illinois Teamsters boss John Coli Sr., a close ally of the state’s Democratic Party and then-Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel (D).

So far, so shady but legal. But Coli was up to more than influencing. He wanted a piece of the action from the studio that hosted production of television series including *Empire* and *Chicago Fire*. In 2014, Coli began demanding five-figure quarterly kickbacks from Cinespace, and he might have gotten away with it if Pissios did not wear a wire for federal investigators. In a meeting recorded by the feds between a coached Pissios and Coli, Pissios claimed

the missing money from the kickback scheme had been discovered. Coli told him to fire the discoverer. After Coli found that Pissios’s payment—which the feds had observed—was short, he threatened labor action against Cinespace in a textbook case of “labor peace” extortion.

The feds had their man. Prosecutors charged Coli in 2017 with taking at first \$100,000 in extorted payments, with later superseding indictments raising the amount the government thought it could prove to \$325,000. Then, despite having once boasted that “You can cut my fingers off, I wouldn’t talk,” Coli pled guilty in 2019 and turned cooperating witness. Shortly after Coli pled guilty, the feds indicted then-State Senator Tom Cullerton (D), at the time chair of the state Senate’s labor committee, for embezzling from local and regional bodies of the Teamsters Union by means of a no-show job provided by Coli. Cullerton would join Coli in pleading guilty to corruption charges and resigning his office in 2022.

Indictments from the Pages of Labor History

Proving the old adage that “the more things change, the more they stay the same” were two indictments handed down by federal prosecutors this summer which seemed pulled from the pages of labor history. The first targeted a racketeering scheme on the docks of San Juan, Puerto Rico, in which the president of a local of the International Longshoremen’s Association and three others allegedly ran a labor peace extortion racket targeting shipping companies seeking to unload at the port of San Juan.

The feds allege the defendants ran a scheme reminiscent of the days of *On the Waterfront*, with the union boss, two stevedore company agents, and a port authority employee conspiring to extort five-figure payments from shipping companies “under the threat of strikes and blockades on the part of union members of the ILA-1740 of the International Longshoremen’s Association, AFL-CIO, and under false representations that companies had to pay a fee in order to be able to use “union-free labor” for the loading

and unloading of cargo,” to quote the government’s press release on the indictment.

In addition, three union members were charged with a parallel fraud scheme in which they falsely used the union card of a co-defendant to make it appear that the co-defendant was working hours—and therefore obtaining benefit accrual—that she was not.

While the Five Families of the New York City Mafia have much less influence over organized labor than they once did, law enforcement still must periodically interdict their efforts to target organized labor for racketeering activity. In September 2021, the feds and the New York Police Department arrested 14 defendants including 10 alleged members or associates of the Colombo family including then-alleged boss Andrew Russo and what federal prosecutors called the family’s “entire administration” for a labor racketeering scheme targeting a New York City local union. (Russo died awaiting trial in April 2022.)

The indictment alleged that the defendants had used the threat of violence to extort from a labor union official’s salary for two decades and then expanded the extortion scheme in 2019 to compel the extorted official and others to use Colombo-affiliated vendors for the union’s business



Credit: PunkToad. License: <https://bit.ly/3roKeeg>.

The temptation to raid workers’ pension funds, union dues funds, and health benefit funds is as true today as it was before Jimmy Hoffa went to the Machus Red Fox in 1975.

and the business of its affiliated health fund. The acting U.S. Attorney’s statement described the charges:

Today’s charges describe a long-standing, ruthless pattern by the administration of the Colombo crime family, its captains, members and associates, of conspiring to exert control over the management of a labor union by threatening to inflict bodily harm on one of its senior officials and devising a scheme to divert and launder vendor contract funds from its health care benefit program.

Conclusion

It has been over 30 years since then-U.S. Attorney Rudy Giuliani announced a civil Racketeering Influenced and Corrupt Organizations lawsuit against the International Brotherhood of Teamsters that would lead to the 1994 consent decree that created the federal oversight that ended mob control of Jimmy Hoffa’s old union. In that time, federal law enforcement has remedied the lackadaisical approach to organized crime of J. Edgar Hoover’s FBI and brought many Mafia figures to justice, hitting labor racketeering schemes hard.

But as this survey of recent history shows, the temptation to raid workers’ pension funds, union dues funds, and health benefit funds is as true today as it was before Hoffa went to the Machus Red Fox in 1975. The United Auto Workers officials corrupted in the Fiat Chrysler scheme sold out their members in exchange for personal perks. The political influence schemes run by John Dougherty and John Coli Sr. were classical political corruption, including giving no-show jobs to powerful politicians with influence over organized labor’s political agendas. And the indictments of the alleged San Juan schemers and Cosa Nostra men show that the old habits of union-related racketeering are not dead yet.

And this report tells only the stories of the crooked bosses and wiseguys who got caught. With the Biden administration (like the Obama administration before it) refusing to increase transparency on union “trusts,” needed scrutiny from the public and union members will have to wait. ■

Read previous articles from the Labor Watch series online at CapitalResearch.org/category/labor-watch/.



BIG MONEY IN DARK SHADOWS

Arabella Advisors' Half-billion-dollar
"Dark Money" Network

Hayden R. Ludwig

According to media personalities and politicians, nameless, faceless donors wield outsized influence over the American political process due to the so-called "dark money" they use to fund think tanks and advocacy groups. But that's far from the whole story. "Dark money" exists on both sides of the aisle. In fact, the Left seems to have deeper and darker pockets of cash than anyone suspected.

Learn more about liberal "dark money" in CRC's original report.



CAPITAL RESEARCH CENTER
AMERICA'S INVESTIGATIVE THINK TANK



THE LAWSUIT LOBBY

By Robert Stilson

“Mr. Simpson, this is the most blatant case of fraudulent advertising since my suit against the film The NeverEnding Story.”

—Lionel Hutz, attorney in *The Simpson’s* “I Can’t Believe It’s a Law Firm!”

Summary: *What happens when the lawyers are themselves the special interest? The collective influence of the plaintiffs’ trial bar—what its critics have variously called the “Lawsuit Lobby,” the “Trial Lawyer Underground,” and “Trial Lawyers, Inc.”—provides an interesting vehicle for examining how those who fight for their clients in the courtroom also fight for themselves outside of it. Perhaps naturally, the plaintiffs’ lawyers have broadly opposed efforts to make litigation generally less common, less expensive, or less time-consuming. And their efforts have implications for our entire civil justice system.*

Jokes aside, the public does hold a rather mixed view of the legal profession. One recent Gallup poll found that only 19 percent of respondents felt that lawyers had high or very high standards of honesty and ethics, while 30 percent felt that the profession’s standards were either low or very low. A net –11 points for attorneys isn’t particularly good. Nurses were rated at +78, police officers at +38, and bankers at +7, for instance. But lawyers still trounced politics in the public’s perception. Members of Congress were rated at –53, while lobbyists bottomed out at –58.

On the one hand, blanket judgments like these are always unfair to the scrupulous professionals who populate every line of work, lawyers and lobbyists of all stripes included. Honesty and ethics are traits found in individuals, not categories. At the same time, it is worth asking *why* people think the way they do. What do they see that they don’t trust? It certainly seems reasonable to assume that many associate both professions with efforts to use public institutions to secure private advantages—for their clients, for themselves, or both—potentially to the detriment of others or the public at large.

Thinking about lawyers and special interests in this manner leads to an interesting question: What happens when the lawyers are *themselves* the special interest? The collective



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Lionel Hutz, in The Simpson’s “I Can’t Believe It’s a Law Firm!”

influence of the plaintiffs’ trial bar—what its critics have variously called the “Lawsuit Lobby,” the “Trial Lawyer Underground,” and “Trial Lawyers, Inc.”—provides an interesting vehicle for examining how those who fight for their clients in the courtroom also fight for themselves outside of it. And their efforts have implications for our entire civil justice system.

Mass Torts

Americans sue one another a lot, and they spend a great deal of money doing so. Millions of civil cases are filed in state courts every year, and hundreds of thousands more get docketed in federal court. In 2016, the Manhattan Institute reported that “the direct costs of tort litigation alone are roughly one-tenth the entire health care sector.” In 2010, economist Paul H. Rubin wrote in the *New York Times* that as the world’s most litigious society, the United States was spending the equivalent of 2.2 percent of its gross domestic product—about \$310 billion—on tort litigation.

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A survey of over 200 participants found that 64 percent were somewhat or extremely dissatisfied with how their lawyer handled their case.



Americans sue one another a lot, and they spend a great deal of money doing so.

Approximately half of that total was due to transaction costs (mostly legal fees) rather than damages actually recovered by plaintiffs.

Mass torts—where a defendant allegedly harmed large numbers of plaintiffs, generally in a personal injury context—can be aggregated into gigantic federal multidistrict litigation (MDL), with the goal of streamlining large numbers of similar claims so that certain efforts are not duplicated across each individual case. A 2021 report released by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Institute for Legal Reform noted that approximately two-thirds of all private civil cases that were pending in federal court were part of such multidistrict litigation. Legal scholars have commented that it has “quietly revolutionized civil procedure.”

Many have no doubt become familiar with multidistrict litigation—even without realizing it—through media reports about the ongoing litigation over combat earplugs manufactured by 3M and issued to many U.S. military service members from 2003–2015. In what has become the largest multidistrict litigation in history, 3M is facing approximately 230,000 claims that the earplugs were defective and led to hearing damage for veterans who used them. Trials, appeals, and negotiations are proceeding along multiple tracks, and there is substantial uncertainty surrounding the size of any potential future settlement, with numbers ranging from \$1 billion to \$100 billion and everything in between.

As its prominence within the federal court system has increased, multidistrict litigation has also attracted some

criticism. Some have raised concerns with how marginal or even meritless cases can be mixed in with legitimate ones when defendants are hit with so many lawsuits at the same time. 3M has contended that this is the case with the litigation over its earplugs. The Institute for Legal Reform has argued that, while multidistrict litigation was “historically . . . an efficient way of handling the pretrial phase of large numbers of similar lawsuits,” it has since become a vehicle for plaintiffs’ lawyers “to litigate questionable or meritless claims hoping that the sheer number of cases will pressure defendants to settle.”

Scrutiny has also focused on who actually benefits from multidistrict litigation. University of Georgia Law Professor Elizabeth Chamblee Burch has conducted some of the more interesting research on this topic. Her 2019 book *Mass Tort Deals: Backroom Bargaining in Multidistrict Litigation* makes the case that the current system fosters an environment in which “plaintiffs’ lawyers may sell [their clients] out in backroom settlements that compensate lawyers handsomely, pay plaintiffs little, and deny them the justice they seek.” Burch and Margaret S. Williams of the Federal Judicial Center had elsewhere examined how a relatively small group of individual attorneys were disproportionately being appointed to lead multidistrict litigation. That is, in the words of a Reuters article covering the research, “a handful of plaintiffs’ lawyers dominates MDL litigation.”

The two have also attempted to measure plaintiff sentiment towards their multidistrict litigation experience. A survey of over 200 participants found that 64 percent were somewhat or extremely dissatisfied with how their lawyer handled their case. Half did not feel like “I could trust my lawyer to act in my best interest,” with a remarkable 37 percent strongly disagreeing with that statement. Survey participants reportedly also “had much to say about fees”: 10 percent thought that their attorney’s fees were reasonable, while 60 percent felt that they were unreasonable, including more than 40 percent who considered them “extremely unreasonable.” One participant, for example, was billed \$575 for her lawyer’s steak dinner, \$5,000 for his private aircraft, and \$6,630 in interest charges.

Lawyers’ fees in multidistrict litigation can certainly be substantial. A pair of settlements in 2004–2005 with Johnson & Johnson over the drug Propulsid were valued at over \$70 million, but only 37 of the more than 6,000 claimants who



A report by the Institute for Legal Reform detailed evidence that in consumer class actions “the overwhelming majority” of settlements “deliver nothing to class members.”

participated in the settlement program received any money—a little more than \$6.5 million total. The lead plaintiffs’ lawyers in that case, who had negotiated their fees directly with Johnson & Johnson, received \$27 million. After conducting their survey of plaintiff experiences, Burch and Williams wrote simply that the multidistrict litigation system “needs reform” for the way that it undermines “fundamental tenets of due process, procedural justice, attorney ethics and tort law.” The proper goal of any such reforms, according to Burch, “isn’t to eliminate these lawsuits; it’s to save them.”

Class Actions

Another method of streamlining large numbers of claims is the class action lawsuit, in which one or more named plaintiffs sue on behalf of a large number of unnamed individuals (the “class”) who were all allegedly harmed by a defendant in a similar way. The number of consumer class actions filed in the United States almost tripled from 2009 to 2018. In 2020, they made up a full quarter of all consumer protection suits that were filed. One study estimated that defendants spent as much as \$3.37 billion on class action litigation in 2021 alone.

Proponents of class actions argue that they are an efficient (or indeed, the only) method of pursuing certain claims, particularly when individual damages are relatively small and it would be impractical for any one plaintiff to sue over them. While acknowledging their value in this respect, critics contend that in practice the class action system—particularly in the consumer context—is regularly abused by financially self-interested lawyers, with little-to-no benefit accruing to the class members who were allegedly harmed by the conduct at issue.

To be sure, the “harm” claimed in some consumer class actions can appear rather dubious. A California man recently sued the company that makes Texas Pete hot sauce on behalf of everyone in the country who had purchased a bottle, claiming that the company had harmed them by naming their sauce “Texas Pete” despite producing it in North Carolina. Another suit claimed that Subway should be liable because natural variations in the baking process meant that some of its “footlong” sandwiches did not measure exactly 12 inches. A class action settlement against Godiva Chocolatier over the fact that its chocolates had the

phrase “Belgium 1926” on them—reflecting the location and year of the company’s founding—despite being manufactured in Pennsylvania allowed class members to claim compensation of up to \$25 each, while the attorneys pocketed \$2.8 million.

Some have worked to expose these and other problems with class actions and offer potential solutions. A comprehensive report recently released by the Institute for Legal Reform detailed evidence that consumer class actions “typically provide very little benefit” to class members, noting that “the overwhelming majority” of settlements “deliver nothing to class members.” One study released by the law firm Jones Day analyzed 110 federal consumer class action settlements from 2010 to 2018 and found that “only a small fraction of class members” received any money at all from the settlements, while “class counsel are often given very large attorneys’ fee awards even when class members receive little to no monetary recovery.” It concluded that its “findings . . . align with the recent criticism of consumer fraud class action settlements . . . that they may actually harm consumers and primarily benefit class counsel.”

Class actions can in fact be extremely lucrative for the attorneys who file them. Contingency fees typically range between 20 and 33 percent. Yet another study that looked at settle-



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A California man recently sued the company that makes Texas Pete hot sauce on behalf of everyone in the country who had purchased a bottle, claiming that the company had harmed them by naming their sauce “Texas Pete” despite producing it in North Carolina.

ments from 2019 to 2020 found that “the majority—and in some cases the vast majority—of settlement awards are used to pay for attorneys’ fees, litigation costs, and other administrative expenses.” The Institute for Legal Reform’s report argued that consumer class actions have become little more than “a vehicle for generating profit for the plaintiffs’ bar,” with “the only ‘winners’” frequently being “the plaintiffs’ lawyers who are paid handsomely to file class actions (often based on meritless theories) that ultimately provide little (if any) real benefit to the absent class members, generate all sorts of ethical issues, and needlessly protract litigation.”

It is worth briefly considering some examples from the report. The dispute in *Spillman v. RPM Pizza, LLC* involved unsolicited robocalls offering promotions on pizzas. The final settlement saw just 253 class members receive a combined \$8,795 in compensation, while their attorneys pocketed over \$2.5 million. In *Farrell v. Bank of America, N.A.*, the defendant agreed to establish a fund to compensate plaintiffs for the improper \$35 overdraft fees it had charged them. Although the actual cash benefit available to each individual class member was quite small, the lawyers in *Farrell* were awarded \$14.5 million in fees—which worked out to a rate of \$6,700/hour for the time they spent on the case. The report observed the “unfortunate reality” that many class action attorneys “can and do structure settlements in ways that primarily benefit themselves.”

Finally, there is the controversial issue of *cy pres*, a mechanism through which a court will distribute unclaimed or otherwise unpayable settlement funds to third-party nonprofits instead. The Institute for Legal Reform’s report contends that not only does this fail to provide any direct benefit to class members, but it also “often results in class money being funneled to advocacy-based organizations whose ideology or partisan bent is at odds with that of certain class members,” including groups that are involved in supporting the plaintiffs’ bar itself.

In the case of *In re LivingSocial Marketing & Sales Practice Litigation*, for example, the defendants agreed to set aside \$4.5 million for a settlement fund, but only \$1.89 million worth of claims by class members were ever made. The remaining settlement money wound up being donated via *cy pres* to the Consumers Union and the National Consumers League. The plaintiffs’ lawyers were awarded \$1.35 million in fees, which the Institute for Legal Reform’s report observed was equal to 71 percent of the total amount actually paid to the class members themselves.

The 2019 Supreme Court case of *Frank v. Gaos* arose from an \$8.5 million class action settlement with Google, which was to be distributed as follows: \$2.125 million in attorney’s



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The American Association for Justice is the most prominent organizational manifestation of the Lawsuit Lobby.

fees for the plaintiffs’ lawyers, \$1 million for administrative costs, \$5,000 for each of the three named class representatives, and \$5.3 million for six third-party nonprofits via *cy pres*—including all three law schools that the plaintiffs’ lawyers had attended. The estimated 129 million unnamed members of the class received nothing.

American Association for Justice

The casual observer could certainly be forgiven for thinking some changes are warranted. Academics, advocacy groups, and others have made a variety of recommendations from different perspectives, and legislation is periodically proposed. Perhaps naturally, efforts to make litigation generally less common, less expensive, or less time-consuming have been broadly opposed by the plaintiffs’ lawyers themselves, who represent an organized set of interests that may be thought of as the Lawsuit Lobby.

The American Association for Justice (AAJ) is the most prominent organizational manifestation of the Lawsuit Lobby. Organized as a 501(c)(6) nonprofit, its regular members are licensed attorneys who primarily represent the plaintiff in civil cases or the defendant in criminal ones. In practice, the AAJ is widely identified with the professional interests of the plaintiff’s bar specifically. It claims more than 20,000 lawyers as members.

The AAJ was founded as the National Association of Claimants’ Compensation Attorneys by a small group of workers’ compensation lawyers back in 1946. It was renamed as the Association of Trial Lawyers of America in 1971, and it adopted its current name in 2006. The president of the Institute for Legal Reform—which is critical of the AAJ—called its most recent name change “an astound-



The president of the Institute for Legal Reform called AAJ's most recent name change "an astounding admission of the unpopularity of trial lawyers in America."

ing admission of the unpopularity of trial lawyers in America.”

Indeed, an internal memo regarding the decision to change the group’s name explained that the AAJ had become concerned with being seen as a special interest group and was launching “an aggressive public education campaign to improve the image of trial lawyers, as well as to protect and strengthen the civil justice system.” Perceiving a need to “win back the public in both the jury box and the ballot box,” the organization’s research had apparently demonstrated that “if our message is or seems to be only about helping lawyers, we lose. On the other hand, if we concentrate on protecting the civil justice system from greedy corporate CEOs, we win.”

The AAJ has thus endeavored to portray itself as the defender of ordinary Americans against the machinations of “powerful corporate interests” broadly and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce specifically. This rings hollow with critics like Victor Schwartz, who wrote recently in the *Washington Examiner* that despite the AAJ’s “bid to claim a monopoly as the ones fighting ‘for justice’ in America . . . the reality is trial lawyers are no different from any other self-interested group focused on making money.” Among the examples Schwartz cited was the AAJ’s opposition to the proposed Lawsuit Abuse Reduction Act, which would have mandated and strengthened court-imposed sanctions against attorneys who were found to have made frivolous or otherwise improper claims in their filings.

In light of such criticisms, it is worth exploring the nature of the AAJ’s advocacy, which includes “beating back limits on lawyer fees, evidence and discovery, and loser pays.” It promotes class actions as “an effective tool for consumers and employees hurt by large corporations” and has derided reform efforts as an attempt by “corporations and their front groups” to avoid accountability “for their dishonest and deceptive practices.” It also fights against limits on medical malpractice and medical products suits, supports liability for firearm manufacturers and retailers if someone uses a gun to commit a crime, opposes qualified immunity for law enforcement, and supports significantly increased mandatory insurance requirements for trucking companies.

One of the AAJ’s top priorities is reducing the use of arbitration instead of litigation to settle disputes. While arbitration certainly has its pros and cons, it is generally cheaper and faster than a lawsuit—which can mean lower attorney’s fees. A 2022 study by the Institute for Legal Reform (which supports arbitration) found that consumers and employees who filed arbitration claims rather than lawsuits were on average more likely to prevail, received higher awards, and had their cases resolved sooner. The institute’s president remarked that “the data shows exactly why it’s the trial bar’s number one priority to prohibit arbitration and increase the number of lawsuits.” Arbitration simply isn’t as lucrative for the lawyers.

Incidentally, this has not prevented some plaintiffs’ attorneys from seeking to use arbitration when it benefits them. The Institute for Legal Reform has pointed out that Morgan & Morgan—the largest personal injury law firm in the country—has included arbitration provisions in its own employee agreements, as well as those concluded with its clients. University of Georgia Law Professor Elizabeth Chamblee Burch noticed something similar in her research, finding that “plaintiffs’ attorneys are taking advantage of arbitration provisions and waiving plaintiffs’ rights to sue them collectively when it suits them.”

The AAJ maintains a community of more than 100 litigation groups focusing on common issues faced by trial lawyers, as well as specific grounds for filing lawsuits. There are groups devoted to class actions, firearms, vaccines, time-shares, pressure cookers, e-cigarettes, trampolines, tap water burns, motorcycles, nursing homes, “environmental racism,” and many other topics. Specific litigation groups are also dedicated to issues giving rise to large multidistrict litigation, including 3M’s combat earplugs.

The Climate Change Litigation Group, established in 2019, provides a forum for lawyers who file lawsuits that seek to hold oil and gas companies liable for claimed costs related to climate change. The AAJ has elsewhere supported calls to make “fossil fuel companies . . . pay their fair share”—billions of dollars—to state and local governments to compensate for those companies’ allegedly tortious role in bringing about climate change. Such lawsuits are problem-



In 2010, the Washington Post described the AAJ as “one of the heaviest hitters in Washington politics” and “one of the Democratic Party’s most influential political allies.”

atic for multiple obvious reasons and have been uniformly unsuccessful when heard on their merits.

In its most recent IRS Form 990, the AAJ reported total revenue of about \$25.7 million. Most of this—over \$19 million—came from membership dues. Its total expenses were approximately \$24.9 million, with employee salaries and benefits accounting for about half. Linda Lipsen, the group’s executive director, has received more than \$8.6 million in total compensation from the AAJ and its related organizations since 2011, including over \$2.8 million from August 2018 through July 2020 alone.

The AAJ also controls several affiliated nonprofits, including the \$24 million American Association for Justice Robert L. Habush Endowment, a 501(c)(3) that primarily serves as a grantmaker. Its grantees have included a left-of-center research and advocacy group called the Center for Progressive Reform (\$195,000 since 2016) and an environmental grantmaker and fiscal sponsor called the Sustainable Markets Foundation (\$774,000 since 2016). In 2020, it gave a small \$10,825 grant to the Center for Popular Democracy, a left-wing activist group recommended by the Democracy Alliance donor collective, which counts George Soros among its most prominent members. The Center for Popular Democracy has advocated for everything from the Green New Deal to socialized housing to defunding the police.

Allies on the Left

Plaintiff-side trial lawyers have long been seen as closely aligned with left-of-center politics. A recent report from the Alliance for Consumers looked at the political contributions of eight prominent plaintiff-side law firms from 2017 to 2020 and found that 99 percent of the \$15 million given by the firms themselves, their attorneys, and other staff members went to Democratic campaigns and allied committees. The San Francisco-based firm of Lief Cabraser, for example, produced exactly \$30 for Republicans out of more than \$2.5 million in total political giving over that time period, according to the report.

The AAJ behaves largely in accordance with the apparent political views of its membership. Although it claims to be bipartisan, the AAJ’s affiliated political action commit-

tee (PAC) is overwhelmingly partisan in practice. During the 2020 election cycle, 97 percent of its contributions to federal candidates went to Democrats. Since the 2004 election cycle, it has never given more than 6.4 percent to Republicans. In 2010, the *Washington Post* described the AAJ as “one of the heaviest hitters in Washington politics” and “one of the Democratic Party’s most influential political allies.”

Democratic politicians certainly appear to have reciprocated for this support. In what the *Wall Street Journal* called “the definition of a corrupt political bargain,” the 2021 budget bill passed by the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives included an amendment to the Internal Revenue Code that would have allowed lawyers who filed suits on a contingency fee basis to immediately deduct expenses related to that litigation—depositions, expert testimony, discovery, and similar costs.

The AAJ has long sought this particular tax break on behalf of its members, though it also recognized that because “a stand-alone bill to help lawyers” wasn’t going to happen in Congress, the trial bar needed “to tuck it into something” in order to give it a chance at becoming law. As the *Journal* observed, it is not difficult to see how the availability of an immediate tax deduction for litigation costs could incentivize lawyers to file less-than-ironclad lawsuits and to keep them going. One estimate put the cost of the proposed deduction at \$2.5 billion over 10 years, which the *Journal* argued amounted to “a direct income transfer to plaintiffs’ lawyers, who will turn around and finance Democratic election campaigns.”

Some Democratic lawmakers are also working to help trial lawyers by putting their thumbs on the scale against arbitration and in favor of litigation. The Forced Arbitration Injustice Repeal (FAIR) Act of 2022—which passed the House on a near-party-line vote—would make pre-dispute arbitration agreements unenforceable in employment, consumer, antitrust, or civil rights cases. In voicing their opposition to the FAIR Act, the Institute for Legal Reform and many other groups wrote that it would “effectively ban arbitration provisions in private contracts,” to the sole advantage of the plaintiffs’ lawyers “who would directly benefit from increased class action litigation.”

In addition to politicians, the AAJ also works with like-minded activist groups. At the group's 1980 convention, Ralph Nader called for the creation of what ultimately became Public Justice, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit advocacy group (with an affiliated law firm) that is active on many of the same issues as the AAJ. This includes class actions, with Public Justice describing itself as “the only public interest organization in the country that both aggressively prosecutes a wide range of class actions and has a special project to preserve class actions and prevent their abuse.” Public Justice also advertises itself as “an excellent candidate for *cy pres* funding for a wide variety of cases.” It has received almost 150 such awards through federal and state courts, which it uses “to effect systemic change for social, economic, and environmental justice.” In 2019, the AAJ gave a \$100,000 grant to Public Justice.

In 2017, the two groups worked together to attack the proposed Fairness in Class Action Litigation Act, which would have reformed federal class actions in a number of ways, including requiring that attorneys demonstrate how to identify members of the putative class and how to distribute any resulting monetary relief directly to them. It also would have limited attorney's fees to a percentage of the payment actually received by class members alongside the value of any equitable relief. And it would have allowed the payment of such fees only after the money was actually distributed to class members. The bill also would have required multi-district litigation plaintiffs to submit certain evidence related to their injury and mandated that they receive at least 80 percent of any monetary recovery for their claims—measures aimed simultaneously at weeding out meritless cases and ensuring that attorney's fees and costs don't excessively eat into legitimate claims.

While the relative merits of each individual provision of the Fairness in Class Action Litigation Act are certainly open to reasonable debate, the AAJ came out aggressively and unequivocally against it, characterizing it as “a hand-out to powerful corporations that do not want to be held accountable.” It claimed that the bill's proposed reforms “would eviscerate nearly every type of class action and mass tort action brought in the United States” and accused lawmakers of “supporting a bill that rigs the legal system against [their] constituents.” Overwhelming support from Republicans allowed the bill to pass the House over uniform Democratic opposition, but it ultimately died in the Senate.

Finally, on issues related to the composition of federal courts, the AAJ has aligned itself with the prominent judicial activist group Demand Justice and a number of other left-wing organizations. It has joined calls for the Biden Administration to nominate “professionally and demograph-



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Another method of streamlining large numbers of claims is the class action lawsuit, in which one or more named plaintiffs sue on behalf of a large number of unnamed individuals (the “class”) who were all allegedly harmed by a defendant in a similar way.

ically diverse candidates” to the federal bench, as well as to refrain from nominating any more “corporate lawyers.” It has also supported calls to expand the number of federal district and circuit court judges in line with these preferences.

A Different Sort of Special Interest

In one sense, the Lawsuit Lobby is like any other special interest: It promotes the private professional interests of its members—in this case, trial attorneys—among both politicians and the general public. But in another sense it is rather different because its members operate within our most important public institutions, and their actions inside and outside the courtroom can profoundly impact the lives of others. The public rightly considers this responsibility as transcending pure self-interest, and the vast majority of the bar recognizes and accepts this.

Returning to the question posed at the outset: How do we explain the results of Gallup's poll, in which respondents viewed lawyers and lobbyists as having relatively low standards of honesty and ethics? And how do we answer this without descending into tropes about ambulance chasers and palm greasers? One idea might be to consider the nature of the influence exercised by the Lawsuit Lobby and ask whether its own interests are always in line with our preferred notion of civil justice. ■

Read previous articles from the Organization Trends series online at [CapitalResearch.org/category/organization-trends/](https://www.CapitalResearch.org/category/organization-trends/).

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HAYDEN LUDWIG**



RISE OF THE ECO-RIGHT

A few dozen lobbying, litigation, and activist nonprofits that identify themselves as free market or broadly right-of-center are attempting to rebrand environmentalism and global warming ideology as conservative values. The Capital Research Center broke the news that these “eco-Right” groups also are secretly bankrolled by liberal mega-donors.



CAPITAL RESEARCH CENTER
AMERICA'S INVESTIGATIVE THINK TANK



THE ELLEN MACARTHUR FOUNDATION'S WAR ON PLASTIC AND PROSPERITY

By Ken Braun

Summary: *Plastic packaging is a conservation miracle that preserves food from spoilage at trivial cost and saves enormous resources compared to aluminum, paper, and other options. Using abundant, low-cost plastic means conserving hard to replace nature. Wealthy nations have developed environmentally responsible plastic disposal systems, and the secret to ending plastic pollution in the ocean is to help low-income nations catch up. But the Ellen MacArthur Foundation (EMF) has declared a “plastic pollution crisis” and holds the scientifically illiterate view that nothing should ever be thrown away. So, why are big plastic users like Coca-Cola and Nestlé some of EMF’s biggest allies?*

Opinion polls show Americans are deeply troubled over issues such as inflation, immigration, spiking crime rates, and soaring gasoline prices. They don’t show any anxiety over the “plastic pollution crisis.”

But plastic has become a big worry for the United Nations and dozens of the world’s largest corporations, such as Visa, Coca-Cola, Unilever and Nestlé. To address this supposed crisis, the plastic worriers have aligned with the Ellen MacArthur Foundation (EMF), a little-known yet obviously influential nonprofit based in the United Kingdom.

This is how the EMF describes what they have in store for us:

We must change how we design, use, and reuse plastics. We cannot simply recycle or reduce our way out of the plastic pollution crisis. If we don’t act now, by 2050 there could be more plastic than fish in the oceans.

Although plastic pollution on the high seas is a valid concern, Americans and those who live like us are not the cause of it. A 2021 report from Our World in Data showed that the United States, despite having 25 percent of the planet’s total gross domestic product, is responsible for a tiny 0.25 percent of the plastic reaching the ocean. Added all together, every nation in North America, all of Europe, Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, Australia, New



Credit: World Economic Forum. License: <https://bit.ly/3UZ17jd>

The eponymous founder of the foundation is British Dame Ellen MacArthur, a retired competitive yachtswoman who once held the world record for solo circumnavigating the globe.

Zealand, Israel, and Russia contribute only 5.5 percent of the problem.

Developing and low-income nations in Asia and Africa produce 90 percent of the ocean’s plastic problem. Together, China and India are the cause of more than 20 percent.

Rapidly helping the impoverished and developed world become wealthy with healthy waste management systems is the credible (to say nothing of humane) solution to plastic waste in the ocean and many other, much more pressing problems. Reliable and low-cost electricity, the rule of law, human rights, a stable currency, and a few other critical inputs are the proven recipe for the change they need.

But those aren’t the changes the Ellen MacArthur Foundation and its wealthy corporate allies have in mind

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when they advise “We must change.” Instead, the “we” they’re addressing is us. Rather than addressing obvious problems of poverty with the proven solutions for helping the rest of the world get rich, the EMF has invented a new economic model:

We’re a charity committed to creating a circular economy, which is designed to eliminate waste and pollution, circulate products and materials (at their highest value), and regenerate nature. It’s an economic system that delivers better outcomes for people, and the environment.

End waste and pollution, save the world, make everything more valuable, *and* improve life for everyone? *Why hasn’t somebody thought of this before?*

Sarcasm aside, this seems plagiarized from countless “What I Wish For” essays annually submitted to elementary school teachers. A lot of little kids also include equally vague plots for world peace and bringing lost pooches back from the grave.

It is remarkable that supposedly serious adults have recycled these platitudes into a business plan for the planet.

Nature Is Messy

The current plan—as practiced for most of the past three centuries and particularly the past 50–70 years—has lifted billions from poverty, put a few billion of us into a standard of living that was inconceivable to even the richest of us a century ago, effectively ended famines, radically extended lifespans, and (not coincidentally) continues to clean up the worst of the planet’s pollution.

So that’s the market economy.

What does the Ellen MacArthur Foundation’s “circular economy” have to offer?

The eponymous founder is British Dame Ellen MacArthur, a retired competitive yachtswoman who once held the world record for solo circumnavigating the globe. According to her official bio, carrying on board all the supplies needed for the 71-day journey “gave her a very real understanding of what it means to rely on a finite supply of resources, as on the boat food, water and fuel were inescapably linked to success or failure.”

From all this, she concluded that “on land too we rely on finite resources in the form of materials, energy and water.”

Those hoping to grasp this concept without spending the two months alone at sea could attend the first day

of an introductory economics class. As explained by Investopedia: “Scarcity in economics refers to when the demand for a resource is greater than the supply of that resource, as resources are limited.”

A September 2021 meta-analysis of research studies on the circular economy by the *Journal of Industrial Ecology* found more than 100 different definitions of the term, with many “deliberately vague, but principally uncontroversial” that do not address “conflicts, trade-offs, and problems.”

The Ellen MacArthur Foundation fits the trend. Peek through the otherwise inscrutable descriptions of the circular economy presented on the EMF website and the only overarching agenda seems to be that nothing . . . *should ever* . . . be thrown away:

For billions of years, natural systems have regenerated themselves. **Waste is a human invention** [emphasis added]. (From the page titled “Regenerate nature”).

The second principle of the circular economy is to circulate products and materials at their highest value. This means keeping materials in use, either as a product or, when that can no longer be used, as components or raw materials. This way, **nothing becomes waste** [emphasis added] and the intrinsic value of products and materials are retained. (From the page titled “Circulate products and materials”).

Although it sometimes seems like waste is inevitable in certain situations, waste is actually the result of design choices. **There is no waste in nature, it is a concept we have introduced** [emphasis added].

Waste—or “entropy,” for those who recall physics class—is the natural state of the universe. Each conversion of a material into a new item leads to energy lost as heat and degrading of the quality and/or quantity of the material. Increasing chaos is inevitable—and it requires more energy and resources to reassemble materials that are falling apart.

Plastic, according to a September 2020 NPR report, “degrades each time it is reused, meaning it can’t be reused more than once or twice,” and since “new plastic is cheap . . . it’s almost always less expensive and of better quality to just start fresh.”

Metals, on the other hand, retain value and can be recycled with comparatively less effort and energy. Most discarded iron and steel items (70 percent or more) are recycled into new products.

In that *Journal of Industrial Ecology* report, under a section titled “A neglect of established knowledge,” the authors of the paper (three academics, two from Sweden and one from the United Kingdom) made the point this way:

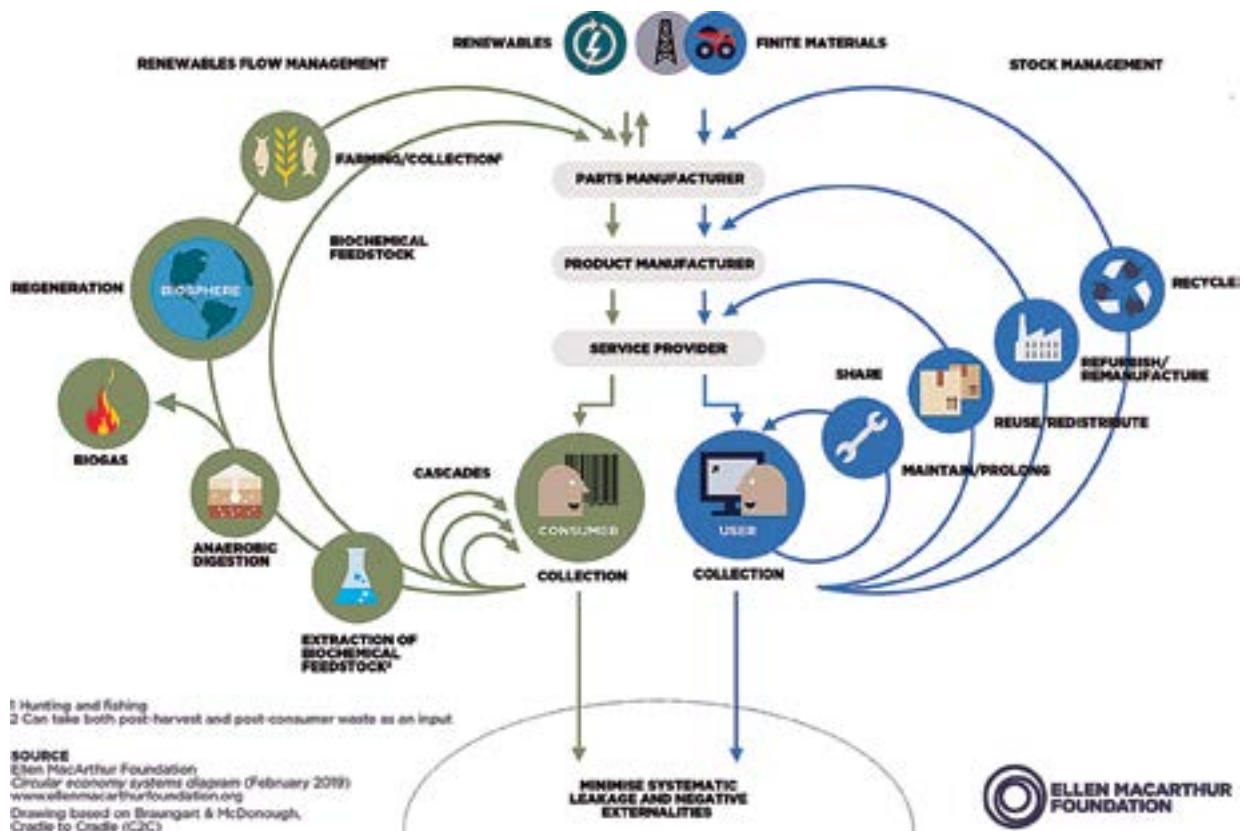
A recurrent critique that is addressed to the circular economy literature is that it ignores much established knowledge. In particular, it neglects the thermodynamic teaching that one can neither create nor destroy matter; whatever resources are used up must end up in the environmental system somewhere, they cannot be destroyed but only converted and dissipated. **A circular economy future where waste no longer exists, where material loops are closed, and the place products are recycled indefinitely is therefore, in any practical sense, impossible.** [emphasis added]

Nature as a “circular” system may be a nice marketing tool, but every Floridian putting their life back together after Hurricane Ian can attest that when nature gets spinning in a circle it can lay waste to a lot of the natural environment, plus the energy and materials that were used by humans to bring order to the chaotic world.

And, though less common, the eruption of a volcano lays waste to landscapes, creatures, structures and often the people in its path. In 1991 Mount Pinatubo in the Philippines launched what a U.S. Geological Survey report called “avalanches of searing hot ash, gas, and pumice fragments” that buried the “once deep valleys” nearby in debris that was 660 feet deep. The 20 million tons of sulfur dioxide (a greenhouse gas) that Pinatubo blasted into the atmosphere damaged the ozone layer and measurably altered the planet’s temperature for a year. A 1982 eruption at Mexico’s El Chichón had a similar effect on global climate. Closer to home, the 1980 Mount St. Helens explosion in Washington smashed 210 square miles of nearby wilderness and removed 1,700 feet from the top of the mountain.

If volcanoes could be blamed on the plastic industry, then the Ellen MacArthur Foundation would certainly (and justifiably) refer to the outcome as “waste and pollution.”

Nature is often catastrophically wasteful. The EMF agenda is based on a fantasy world that doesn’t exist.



Credit: Ellen MacArthur Foundation. License: <https://bit.ly/3O3m1oy>

Peek through the otherwise inscrutable descriptions of the circular economy presented on the Ellen MacArthur Foundation website and the only overarching agenda seems to be that nothing . . . should ever . . . be thrown away.



Even though nature doesn't improve on how it cleans up after itself, people have made profound progress.

Worshipping the Absolute Sanctity of Everything

A circular economy has also been tried and revealed to be very messy.

In more primitive days of just a bit more than a century ago, we had a circular economy for human waste, which at its “highest value” was prized for its ability to “regenerate nature.” Humans produced a lot of it, but quite a bit was also left in smelly piles on the streets by the horses we still needed.

Fortunately, modern farming now uses far more effective synthetic fertilizers (and one of the most important is made possible by natural gas). But unlike the circular economy of our recent past, human waste no longer has value. It's now just definitively “waste”—nasty, smelly waste that needs special sewage systems and treatment to dispose of properly.

And yet, this recently . . . wasteful . . . behavior has provided us with “an economic system that delivers better outcomes for people.” Our environment is better off as well.

Even though nature doesn't improve on how it cleans up after itself, people have made profound progress. Modern sanitary landfills and trash collection are a manmade land conservation miracle. Drive by an old landfill today and you might mistake it for a golf course, or a public park – because that's what they often become. An Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) primer on repurposing landfills reports that “increasingly common end uses include parks, hiking trails, wildlife habitat, sports fields, and golf courses.”

Freshkills near New York City, until 2001 the largest landfill on Earth, is a premier example. It has since been transformed into a refuge where ospreys and other wildlife thrive.

How's that for recycling?

Successful reuse of discarded plastic is another example of remarkable progress in sanitary waste management. But acceptance of all this doesn't fit within the Ellen MacArthur Foundation's totalitarian theory that all waste can be eradicated.

According to the EMF's own data, when plastic beverage bottles are collected for recycling they often find new life as polyester fibers in items such as carpeting and clothing. The 2016 analysis promoting the EMF's “New Plastics Economy” also reports useful applications for recovered plastic junk in the creation of “plastic lumber,” plastic pipes, and trash bags. In addition to cutting down on the plastic getting thrown away, these second-use products reduce the need for new plastic and the carbon footprint needed to harvest and process trees.

Success? Proof that humans are innovative critters with an endless supply of ideas about how to squeeze every nickel of value out of materials and in the process tidy up the place a bit?

By any reasonable analysis, the answer should be a resounding “YES!”

But not for the Ellen MacArthur Foundation. The EMF report portrays these aftermarket plastic products as failures that represent “just one additional use cycle rather than creating a truly circular model.”

Many conventional religious faiths venerate specific objects, people, or creatures. The circular economy, as practiced by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation and its allies, promotes the *absolute sanctity of everything*, where every single molecule we use must be preserved and nothing may be discarded.

This isn't conservation. It's absolutism and religious zealotry.

Some of our stuff must eventually lose all *reasonable value*, relative to what it could be replaced with, so its “highest value” (to borrow the EMF phrasing) is to be put where it inflicts no damage. Worthless items not disposed of properly acquire *negative value* because they pollute the value of what we truly treasure, such as landscapes and oceans.

That's why it's a smart investment for wealthy nations to build sanitary waste management systems that elevate the value of worthless items from negative to neutral. The component parts in a landfill may have lost individual value. But the land itself can be repurposed into parks, ballparks, and more.



Credit: Mr.anded. License: Shutterstock.

Perhaps they should have replaced the logos on curbside recycling bins with photos of plastic bottles floating down some dirty river in Malaysia on the way to the ocean.

A less dogmatic religion might encourage more of this as clever a plan to “eliminate waste and pollution” and “regenerate nature.”

The most successful “circular economy” outcome for plastic in America is to turn it into electricity. An EPA report (using 2018 data) shows 15.8 percent of discarded plastic was used for “combustion with energy recovery,” versus only 8.7 percent recycled and 75.6 percent put in a landfill.

The recycling rate for even the easiest to repurpose plastics was less than 30 percent. According to a 2021 *New York Times* report: “Though many American communities dutifully collect plastic for recycling, much of the scrap has been sent overseas, where it frequently ends up in landfills, or in rivers, streams and the ocean.”

The top destinations the *Times* listed were China, Malaysia, and Indonesia. According to Our World in Data, these three nations put together accounted for more than 20 percent of the plastic trash reaching the ocean in 2019.

The Ellen MacArthur Foundation would have done more to protect the oceans if they had run a campaign to convince those dutiful household recyclers that it was okay to throw the plastic trash into a sanitary American landfill.

Perhaps they should have replaced the logos on curbside recycling bins with photos of plastic bottles floating down some dirty river in Malaysia on the way to the ocean.

A Front for Greenwashing?

Even as we do a fine job keeping trash out of the ocean, the EPA reports discarded plastic is less than 20 percent of the waste in American landfills.

The added irony is that almost all of it was created from what would otherwise be the waste product of refining oil and natural gas. The molecules that become plastic polymers would become something less valuable, or discarded, if not used for plastic. And then we’d need to use up something more valuable to create all the stuff currently made from plastic.

Trees, for example. And that would get expensive. A 2011 research paper produced for the legislature of Northern Ireland crunched the numbers on the “paper or plastic” decision regarding grocery bags and came to this conclusion:

It takes more than four times as much energy to manufacture a paper bag as it does to manufacture a plastic bag. For paper bag production, forests must be cut down (trees are absorbers of greenhouse gases) and then the subsequent manufacturing of bags produces greenhouse gases. . . . Paper bags generate 70% more air and 50 times more water pollutants than plastic bags.

The report also found that paper bags generated 70 percent more air pollution, 50 times the water pollution, and required seven times the trucks to transport them.

Any frugal American knows the truth of this revelation about the usefulness of plastic bags: “They are also put to many other uses in the home . . . such as clearing dog-waste from the streets, and most of them will eventually serve as a bin-liner to safely collect and dispose of household waste.”

In 2020, responding to campaigns against its plastic bottles, Coca-Cola’s head of sustainability observed that the firm’s carbon footprint would increase if the plastic containers were all replaced with aluminum cans or glass bottles.

Coca-Cola ships out 100 billion plastic beverage bottles per year, a major share of the more than 500 billion sold worldwide—most of them made from polyethylene terephthalate (PET) plastic. Those bottles are what many of us think of when we think of plastic pollution. A bottle floating in water is the top return for the Google search term “symbol of plastic pollution.”

The Coke sustainability chief said the firm would continue to use plastic because its customers preferred the lightweight and resealable bottles. “Business won’t be in business if we don’t accommodate consumers,” she said.

She is correct. Plastic use, reuse, and disposal has been and will continue to be improved upon. But for all the forego-



A bottle floating in water is the top return for the Google search term “symbol of plastic pollution.”

ing reasons and others, the Ellen MacArthur Foundation’s “plastic pollution crisis” isn’t upon us.

Yet the list of the EMF’s top-level partners includes none other than Coca-Cola.

The Ellen MacArthur Foundation claims to have the “world’s leading circular economy network” and this isn’t a hollow boast. The EMF’s circular economy agenda has also been adopted by the United Nations Environment Programme.

The EMF’s most recent annual report covering the year prior to August 2021, showed £18.1 million revenue (\$25 million at the 2021 exchange rate).

Her courageous sailing exploits aside, Ellen MacArthur’s absolutist crusade would have nowhere near its current influence without the corporations and institutions that have plowed tens of millions of dollars into marketing her cause. The EMF may have her name on it, but the agenda belongs as much to the corporations such as Coke that made it happen.

In addition to Coca-Cola (KO), the group’s 21-member strategic partner network includes Unilever (UL), Visa (V), BlackRock (BLK), Nestlé (NSRGY), Danone (BN.PA), Groupe Renault (RNO.PA). There are others, but together, these seven publicly traded firms have a market capitalization of more than \$1.2 *trillion*.

The top-level strategic partner group also includes the EMF’s “main philanthropic funders,” such as the Schmidt Family Foundation (founded with the fortunes of former Google CEO Eric Schmidt and his wife, Wendy), MAVA (a foundation based in Switzerland), and the Sun Institute for Environmental & Sustainability (based in Germany).

A second tier of mere “partners” includes 41 firms and groups, including big names such as Wal-Mart, Starbucks, PepsiCo, Microsoft, Google, Morgan Stanley, and Mars (the maker of M&M’s and other candies). A third tier of EMF members has more than 100 firms.

The EMF’s “funding model” is anchored in these partnerships. The recent annual report noted that a “new Network membership structure” had “increased the income streams in this area.” Line items for “Global Partner Donations” and “Network Income” totaled £2.4 million for 2021 (\$3.3 million with the exchange rate at that time).

In addition to that, dedicated funding raised for EMF’s New Plastics Economy Initiative was £3 million in 2021 (\$4.1 million). Coca-Cola, Nestlé, Unilever, Danone, the American candymaker Mars, and Wal-Mart were all cited as partners in the project.

“Greenwashing, according to a March 2022 report in Investopedia, “is the process of conveying a false impression or providing misleading information about how a company’s products are more environmentally sound.”

That definition might explain why so many of the world’s most recognizable plastic users are financially aligned with the world’s most identifiable crusader against plastic consumption.

Plastic Puritanism

Several of the EMF’s 21 top-tier supporters share a very specific business practice: those PET plastic bottles that Coca-Cola refuses to give up.

Danone and Nestlé (along with Coke’s Dasani) have been ranked as three of the four largest water bottling companies in the world. In addition to the beverage titans in EMF’s support base, SC Johnson packages many of its



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Coca-Cola ships out 100 billion plastic beverage bottles per year, a major share of the more than 500 billion sold worldwide—most of them made from polyethylene terephthalate plastic.



Several of the EMF's 21 top-tier supporters share a very specific business practice: those PET plastic bottles that Coca-Cola refuses to give up.

cleaning products in PET, and Unilever uses it to make jars for goods such as Hellmann's mayonnaise.

Many of the other corporations in EMF's top-tier partners are also likely big uses of polyethylene terephthalate (PET) plastic—and for good reason: PET is one of the world's many economically and environmentally beneficial plastic materials.

So is polystyrene (PS), which is used for everyday items such as the iconic red Solo cups we drink from at parties and a lot of our food packaging. Compared to other plastics, polystyrene is low-cost, highly malleable, heat resistant, and thus perfect packaging for the food service industry.

Pumped full of air, it becomes expanded polystyrene (EPS), sometimes known as "Styrofoam," the legal trade name for an EPS insulation product made by DuPont. EPS is well known as the material used for everything from foam cups, bowls, and plates to custom-fitted shipping molds for fragile goods.

Because it is an exceptionally useful and low-cost option for serving and maintaining the ideal temperature of food and drink, PS/EPS packaging is frequently discarded with food waste on it. Food contaminate is obviously difficult to clean up efficiently, regardless of the packaging material, but is a "no-no" for recycling.

Even accepting for the sake of argument the Ellen MacArthur Foundation's alarmist and dubious premise that there is a "plastic pollution crisis," its research shows polystyrene accounts for only 3 percent "of today's plastic packaging market." As a tiny slice of the alleged problem, the no-brainer solution for discarded PS/EPS should be enhanced efforts to make sure it all ends up in the care of a sanitary waste disposal system. Without question that is the proven and most efficient way to keep the comparatively small amounts of polystyrene from reaching the ocean.

But even in the worst-case scenario, 2019 research from the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution debunked a longstanding myth that polystyrene and its foam cousin last forever in the environment. The research showed that sunlight degrades polystyrene into "dissolved organic carbon and trace amounts of carbon dioxide, at lev-

els far too low to impact climate change," and that this transformation takes place within centuries and possibly within decades.

So it is odd that such a tiny piece of the plastic packaging waste stream occupies a conspicuously large and negative place in the Ellen MacArthur Foundation's circular economy crusade.

Released in 2016, *The New Plastics Economy: Rethinking the Future of Plastics* is the EMF's attempt to "achieve systemic change to overcome stalemates in today's plastics economy in order to move to a more circular model."

Unilever is listed as one of the project funders. The forward was written by the president of the U.N. General Assembly.

To the extent that the Ellen MacArthur Foundation ever gets beyond the deliberately vague babble-speak and offers solid policy objectives instead, this report is an example.

A section titled "Selected examples of hard-to-recycle materials and corresponding solutions" singled out polystyrene and arrived at this conclusion: "If the barriers for effective and economically viable collection, sorting, cleaning and recycling of PS cannot be overcome, other packaging solutions could be considered."

The suggestions for replacement food packaging included paper, cardboard, and even the PET plastic favored by Coca-Cola, Danone, and Nestlé—the planet's plastic bottle behemoths and perhaps not coincidentally some of the very biggest corporate partners of the Ellen MacArthur Foundation.

Even the suggestion of paper replacements was dubious. The report praises McDonald's (one of more than 100 firms listed as EMF members) as a pioneer on this point: "McDonald's began to phase out its iconic clamshell foam hamburger box in 1990 and is now phasing out styrofoam beverage cups." Yet the environmental logic for the McDonald's decision disappeared faster than hot Big Macs.

A 1991 study published in *Science* magazine compared the life cycle impact of disposable cups made from both polystyrene and paper. Martin B. Hocking, a chemistry professor at the University of Victoria in British Columbia, found that producing a paper cup instead of one from polystyrene



And “battery technologies” is code-speak for magical electricity storage that does not and may never exist.

foam consumed 14–20 times more electricity and twice the water. Hocking concluded that “polystyrene foam cups should be given a much more even-handed assessment as regards their environmental impact relative to paper cups than they have received during the past few years.”

Hocking’s analysis has held together since. A 2018 report from Singapore’s National Environment Agency compared the resources used to produce single-use takeout food containers. It showed polystyrene plates and clamshell boxes consuming substantially less energy, water, and land than paper equivalents.

Environmentally and Economically Dangerous

Spending less for vital production resources—less for water, less for energy—leads directly to a lower price. If you pay a lot less, then you’re likely using much less. This is conservation, in every sense of the word.

What we throw away is often an example of how we “regenerate natural systems.” Elephants and sea turtles were once the primary source of the malleable material used to create piano keys, billiard balls, eyeglass frames, jewelry, combs, and countless other products. A lot of the plastic in the landfills of rich nations is a critical part of the conservation effort to save those species.

The usually tight correlation between ecological and economic values is not factored into the absolutist thinking underpinning the Ellen MacArthur Foundation’s circular economy. So, it is inevitable that the nonprofit and its corporate supporters would end up promoting paper over polystyrene and would advance solutions at odds with their presumed objectives.

Energy policy is another area where finding specificity for the EMF’s otherwise vague agenda produces a specifically bad result.

In the group’s “circular economy glossary,” the definition provided for “circular economy” has this in the fine print: “It is underpinned by a transition to renewable energy and materials.” Pull up the definition for “renewable energy” and these are the approved examples: “. . . wind, solar,

hydropower, hydrothermal, ocean (wave and tidal), geothermal, and biogas from anaerobic digestion.”

Those options exclude 89 percent of what is currently total worldwide energy production, and 74 percent of total electricity production. It even excludes recycling plastic by burning it to create electricity.

While the Ellen MacArthur Foundation claims that “Decarbonisation of the energy system is necessary and needs to accelerate,” the group’s definition of a solution also excludes nuclear power (currently 10.4 percent of total electricity), the only source of zero-carbon power that could be scaled up to meet the world’s already voracious and growing need.

The approved choices are “wind, solar, and battery technologies.” The wind and the sun are obviously weather-restricted and cannot be scaled up to meet needs. And “battery technologies” is code-speak for magical electricity storage that does not and may never exist. A 2018 report in Massachusetts Institute of Technology Review summarizes the serious work on the subject, finding that, even if the storage capacity were developed, deploying it could become “dangerously unaffordable.”

That’s not an exaggeration. Even for the luckiest of us, economic collapse and possibly starvation would follow rapidly after the loss of reliable and affordable electricity. The Ellen MacArthur Foundation and its strategic partners are promoting an energy policy that is *literally dangerous*.

Unilever, Coca-Cola, Visa, BlackRock, Danone, Nestlé, and many of the other top EMF partners are publicly traded firms. While they may have no legal duty to boldly disclose this agenda to their tens of millions of individual shareholders, they have a moral obligation to do so.

Less reckless, but no less absurd, is the Ellen MacArthur Foundation’s circular economy for food. Typically vague if one doesn’t read through to the fine print, the proposal asserts that “just four crops provide 60% of the world’s calories, while many ingredients that could be used instead and have a lower impact are rarely used.” The sales pitch makes it hard to imagine why these mysterious solutions haven’t been implemented already, since doing so will “provide choices that are better for customers, better for farmers, and better for the environment.”

The fine print is found in an EMF report titled: *The Big Food Redesign*. An info box on page 45 is titled “High Potential Ingredients to Explore.” The big news is that insects are a “highly nutritious and healthy food source with high fat, protein, vitamin, fibre, and mineral content” yet supposedly “emit fewer greenhouse gases and less



Credit: neulife/narabri. License: <https://bit.ly/3WVQJut>.

“John’s clothes were made of camel’s hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. — Matthew 3: 4.”

ammonia than cattle or pigs, and they require significantly less land and water than cattle rearing.”

So get ready to trade up from sirloins and bacon to “dried yellow mealworms” (recently approved by the European Commission as a “novel food”!) The report does concede that eating bugs has “yet to become mainstream in Western food cultures” and blames this on “negative perceptions.”

Speaking of negative perceptions, the Ellen MacArthur Foundation report notes the culinary experts at the European Commission have also estimated that “algae could account for 18% of protein sources by 2054.”

The “John the Baptist” World

“We welcome this landmark study highlighting how the circular economy can help achieve a nature-positive future,” wrote the CEO of Nestlé, in one of many supportive blurbs at the beginning of The Big Food Redesign.

The future? Well, not so much . . .

John’s clothes were made of camel’s hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. —Matthew 3: 4

Nobody on modern Earth should live like this. Some still do. As noted earlier, their poverty is the source of nearly all the plastic pollution in the ocean. Their condition and the ocean’s will be miraculously transformed when they receive reliable energy, modern agriculture, sanitary waste systems, plastics, and the rest of what we now enjoy.

In addition to modern fertilizers and high-yield agriculture (two other modern miracles the reliably risible Ellen MacArthur Foundation recommends moving away from), billions in the wealthy world owe our low-cost, high-quality diets to our use of plastic, an extraordinarily efficient necessity.

It preserves fresh meats and produce so they can be shipped to us without spoilage across several time zones, even oceans. Polystyrene keeps prepared foods at the proper temperature and packaged items fresh for weeks, even months. PET bottles provide cheap luxury beverages at the best of times and save lives when natural disasters knock freshwater systems offline.

A lot of these plastics end up in sanitary waste disposal systems because they are so inexpensive to produce in the first place. That’s a feature, not a bug. We live and eat as well as we do because we can afford the cheap plastic that makes it all happen and the sanitary infrastructure to dispose of it where it does no harm. Food production consumes enormous resources—a critical investment that plastic packaging protects at a trivial cost.

That’s conservation. Replace that advantage with something more expensive, and we’ll all be living poorer lives, and those in the ‘John the Baptist’ world may never catch up.

In a perfect world, there would be no trash. But there would also be no sickness, disease, or death. Adulthood is hard. In the world we have, we do our best to mitigate all these negatives yet accept each as inevitable.

Learning better ways to dispose of items, and keep some things out of landfills, has also been an inevitable evolution. We will continue to get better at it—we always do. But some things, eventually and inevitably, will always have their value fall to zero and need to be thrown away. Almost every hunk of plastic that finally hits a landfill has done disproportionately more benefit than the trivial space it takes up.

The circular economy for plastic being promoted by Nestlé, Unilever, Coke, and the other corporate partners of the Ellen MacArthur Foundation is not leading us to the promised land of an “economic system that delivers better outcomes for people, and the environment.”

That’s happening with the system we already have. ■

Read previous articles from the Green Watch series online at CapitalResearch.org/category/green-watch/.



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LIBERAL *RIGHT-OF-CENTER*
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GREEN *FREE-MARKET*
FAR LEFT *LIBERTARIAN*
PROGRESSIVE **RIGHT-WING**
LEFT OF CENTER *RIGHT-LEANING*

Political and Policy-Oriented Giving After *Citizens United*: An Update to CRC's 2017 Analysis

CRC's update to the 2017 report found: In the 2018 election cycle, liberal grantmakers increased their public policy 501(c)(3) giving, increasing the imbalance from nearly 3.4 to 1 in 2014 to 3.7 to 1 (\$8.1 billion to \$2.2 billion) in 2018. "Dark money" funding through 501(c)(4) groups flipped from a 3.6 to 1 advantage for conservatives to a nearly 2 to 1 (\$81 million to \$42 million) advantage for liberals.

DECEPTION & MISDIRECTION



THE LEFT'S DARK MONEY PLOT TO TAKE OVER ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

By Fred Lucas

Summary: *The Left is less focused today on criminal justice reform than on sweeping election law change, many of which they hope will ring in permanent Democrat majorities in Congress and various state legislatures. House Democrats passed For the People Act (H.R. 1), which would effectively ban voter ID, mandate localities to allow voter registration on Election Day, expand ballot harvesting, and essentially nationalize corruption by undermining the most basic election safeguards. The legislation thankfully died in the Senate, but the Left has a multipronged strategy for seizing control of the elections process. One prong is emulating the Soros prosecutor strategy by taking over local election offices across the United States, putting national campaign resources into what had previously been low-dollar, down-ballot local campaigns.*

Over the past year, conservatives have pushed back against far-left prosecutors elected largely after George Soros, a Hungarian American billionaire, poured tens of millions from his personal fortune into the Justice and Public Safety Political Action Committee (PAC), and other efforts, to overhaul the criminal justice system from the bottom up.

But the Left is less focused today on criminal justice reform than on sweeping election law change, many of which they hope will ring in permanent Democrat majorities in Congress and various state legislatures. House Democrats passed For the People Act (H.R. 1), which would effectively ban voter ID, mandate localities to allow voter registration on Election Day, expand ballot harvesting, and essentially nationalize corruption by undermining the most basic election safeguards.

The legislation thankfully died in the Senate, but the Left has a multipronged strategy for seizing control of the elections process. One is emulating the Soros prosecutor strategy. Only this time the goal is to take over local election offices across the United States, putting national campaign resources into what had previously been low-dollar, down-ballot local campaigns.

Two left-wing organizations are taking different but complementary strategies to taking over the nation's election

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Run for Something, founded in 2017, recruits liberal Democrat candidates under the age of 40 for state and local political offices.

infrastructure. Both initiatives began in April 2022, and both aim to spend \$80 million each. Although George Soros's money isn't behind either of these efforts, both are certainly following his bottom-up approach to implementing change without having to bother with changing any laws.

Fred Lucas is the chief news correspondent and manager of the Investigative Reporting Project for The Daily Signal, and the author of The Myth of Voter Suppression: The Left's Assault on Clean Elections (Post Hill Press, 2022).

Credit: Run for Something. License: <https://bit.ly/3UX00Wz>



“Zuckerbucks” or “Zuck bucks” is the nickname derisively given to the grants from the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, named for Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg and his wife Priscilla Chan.

Run for Something is applying the Soros model more directly. The 527 PAC established the Clerk Work program in April to bankroll liberal candidates running for election clerks, election supervisors, registrars, recorders, and other local officials charged with running elections. In some jurisdictions, this includes judges. The group is spreading the \$80 million over three years.

In a separate effort, the U.S. Alliance for Election Assistance is spending \$80 million over five years on training and coaching of election officials. This sounds benign enough until seeing the alliance is a coalition of left-leaning groups financed largely by Big Tech-connected donors.

The key organization behind the alliance is the Center for Tech and Civic Life, which distributed \$350 million in “Zuckerbucks” to local election jurisdictions in 2020. “Zuckerbucks” or “Zuck bucks” is the nickname derisively given to the grants from the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, named for Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg and his wife Priscilla Chan. While 24 states have enacted bans on private money for elections, critics say the U.S. Alliance for Election Assistance has found a loophole to those bans through financing the coaching.

Power of Election Officials

Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin is quoted saying, “I consider it completely unimportant who in the party will vote, or how; but what is extraordinarily important is this—who will count the votes, and how.”

In the United States, infamous Tammany Hall boss William Tweed once said, “The ballots made no results; the counter made the result.”

Since 2000, after a contested presidential race in Florida, the Left saw the value of electing secretaries of state to supervise elections. But the focus on county clerks is relatively new.

Don't think for a moment that local election administrators are inconsequential.

Some of the controversies in the 2020 election provided a glimpse into the clout local election officials can have and the consequences that incompetence can have on trust in the outcome.

Just as far-left prosecutors can't make laws but have wide latitude in prosecutorial discretion and what sentences to seek, officials on other levels of government have broad discretion—including chief election officials.

Election officials don't make election laws but have the power to interpret and enforce state election regulations. These clerks can decide on such matters as which absentee ballots to count that come in after Election Day, how strictly to enforce voter ID or signature-matching requirements, and how closely poll watchers may monitor the ballot counting on Election Day.

County-level election officials are directly elected in 22 states, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. Another 18 states divide election administration duties between two or more officials, one of whom is usually elected. In 10 states, elected officials appoint members to a local board of elections.

Whether elected or appointed, misconduct by election officials has been a source of scandal over the last decade.

In 2022, in Philadelphia, former U.S. Rep. Michael “Ozzie” Myers (D-PA) pleaded guilty in federal court to bribing the city's election officials to stuff ballot boxes in local races. In Philadelphia, these officials are known as judges of elections. The federal probe commenced in 2020 under the Trump administration Justice Department when



In 2022, in Philadelphia, former U.S. Rep. Michael “Ozzie” Myers (D-PA) pleaded guilty in federal court to bribing the city's election officials to stuff ballot boxes in local races.

Credit: Latest News Today. License: <https://bit.ly/3hPt4t5>.

several lower-level officials cut a deal with federal prosecutors who were aiming at Myers, the ringleader and a Democrat operative in Pennsylvania since leaving Congress in 1980 over his involvement in the Abscam bribery scandal. The Biden administration continued the prosecution, wrapping up the case with the Myers conviction.

In a 2017 lawsuit, Broward County Supervisor of Elections Brenda Snipes (D) admitted that the county had more registered voters than eligible voters and that noncitizens and ineligible felons may have voted in past elections, the *Sun-Sentinel* (Fort Lauderdale, FL) reported. Moreover, a Florida state judge ruled in 2018 that Snipes violated the law when she destroyed ballots from a Democrat congressional primary in August 2016. Not long after taking office, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis (R) removed Snipes from office. Florida empowers governors to remove county officials.

In Wisconsin, Waukesha County Clerk Kathy Nickolaus (R) resigned in 2012 after saying that “human error” led to the late discovery of 14,000 uncounted votes in a contested election, Mother Jones reported.

That same year the Associated Press reported in West Virginia that Lincoln County Clerk Donald Whitten (D) pleaded guilty to stuffing ballot boxes and falsifying absentee ballots in 2010,

These are some of the worst examples of misconduct or incompetence. But a nationalized push to politicize what had largely been a job based more on competence than ideology poses a significant danger to democracy.

Clerk Work

Run for Something announced the Clerk Work program in April, with the plan to spend \$80 million over three years to recruit and train 5,000 candidates from 35 states to run for local offices that have a role in election administration.

Run for Something, founded in 2017, recruits liberal Democrat candidates under the age of 40 for state and local political offices. But the organization imposes a litmus test for candidates to be endorsed for any office—and most of these have nothing to do with a candidate’s ability to run a clean and efficient election.

Run for Something demands any candidate receiving its endorsement support liberal policies such as government-controlled health care, providing legal status to illegal immigrants, environmental regulation, unrestrictive abortion laws, gun control, and labor-union supported policies.

CC —————
Run for Something imposes a litmus test for candidates for any office, which has nothing to do with a candidate’s ability to run a clean and efficient election.

Amanda Litman, the email director for Hillary Clinton’s failed 2016 presidential campaign, and Ross Morales Rocketto, a Democrat Party consultant, launched Run for Something in 2017 out of what they called “anger and exasperation.” Litman, who also worked for the pro-Obama Organizing for Action, said that Run for Something’s mission was to “develop a progressive-leadership pipeline and discover a potential president from its expanding candidate pool.”

Run for Something has partnered with liberal organizations such as Indivisible, Sister District, the Democratic Legislative Campaign Committee, Organizing for Action, Emily’s List, and People for the American Way.

Litman told the *Washington Post* regarding the project, “You can influence quite literally who is administering elections,” and added: “If we don’t do it, we are absolutely going to regret it.”

In July, Litman tweeted about local Republican election officials in New Mexico, Nevada, and Pennsylvania questioning election outcomes, and said,

This is why @runforsomething’s Clerk Work program is so important: The next phase of election subversion & coup attempts will start with local elected officials.

In the months since opening, Clerk Work recruited 300 candidates to run for offices overseeing elections—200 of the candidates in battleground states such as Michigan, Wisconsin, Colorado, and Nevada. However, co-founder Rocketto complained donors were not showing much enthusiasm. “We could have done more if the funding had come in quicker,” he said.

Rocketto contends Democrats have to fight back, pointing to former Donald Trump adviser Steve Bannon’s comments from December 2021, “We are going to take over the election apparatus. American citizens are volunteering,” Bannon said, adding, “They are going to volunteer to become a precinct committeeman. They are going to volunteer to become an election official. They are going



Credit: John Nacion. License: Shutterstock

Whatever one thinks of Steve Bannon or his bluster about “We are going to take over the election apparatus,” he described a public call for supporters to volunteer for election worker positions and to run for office.

to come and run for county clerk and overthrow those [incumbent] county clerks.”

Whatever one thinks of Bannon or his bluster about “We are going to take over the election apparatus,” he described a public call for supporters to volunteer for election worker positions and to run for office. That’s quite different than a nationally organized, well-financed effort to get activists elected as election supervisors.

“Propping up partisan operatives to serve as election clerks will not solve our election integrity issues, and it definitely will not restore confidence in our electoral system on either side of the aisle,” Rep. Mike Garcia, a California Republican, and co-chairman of the House Election Integrity Caucus, told the Daily Signal. “It’s going to take careful consideration and deliberate debate on these matters to improve election integrity and bolster faith in our elections.”

Money Behind Run for Something

If there is a discernable link between Run for Something and the forces behind the U.S. Alliance for Election Excellence, it would be \$10,000 in donations from the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative to Run for Something.

But that is far from the largest donor to the organization. LinkedIn’s political arm gave \$250,000 to Run for Something, according to Open Secrets, which monitors political donations. The 501(c)(4) group Onward Together, founded in 2017 by Hillary Clinton, gave \$100,000 to Run for Something. Act Blue, a PAC devoted to electing Democrats nationally, gave \$50,000 to Run for Something. The political arm of Alphabet Inc., the parent company of Google, contributed \$37,775 to Run for Something. The political arm of Apple Inc. gave \$16,450, and the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees gave \$10,000, according to Open Secrets.

U.S. Alliance for Election Excellence

In April, the same month Clerk Work was launched, the Center for Tech and Civic Life (CTCL) Executive Director Tianna Epps-Johnson announced the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative would no longer be donating to CTCL to fund election administration after his donations prompted about two dozen states to ban similar private donations for running elections in the future. Not long after, Zuckerberg’s spokesperson confirmed he was out of the election-financing business.

Almost immediately, the center moved on to the next project.

Although the U.S. Alliance for Election Excellence is a coalition of left-leaning election “reform” groups, it was launched by the CTCL, which became famous in 2020 for accepting \$350 million from Zuckerberg to dole out to various election jurisdictions. Critics contend the supposed election safety grants did not go to personal protective equipment, but mostly for promoting mail-in voting and ballot drop boxes. An investigation by a Wisconsin special counsel appointed by the state House of Representatives produced a report finding that the funding led to an improper, government-sanctioned, get-out-the-vote campaign that favored Democrats.

Zuckerberg gave a total of \$419 million for election administration grants, the bulk to CTCL, and the rest to the Center for Election Innovation and Research.

There was little doubt where the CTCL stood before Zuckerberg made the donations. The center was founded in 2012 by Tiana Epps-Johnson, Donny Bridges, and Whitney May, who previously worked together at the New Organizing Institute, which the *Washington Post* referred to as “the Democratic Party’s Hogwarts of digital wizardry.”



There was little doubt where the CTCL stood before Zuckerberg made the donations.

Another key member is the Center for Secure and Modern Elections (CSME), which is a front group for the New Venture Fund, a 501(c)(3) arm of the Arabella Advisors network. Arabella Advisors sponsors a vast network of left-leaning organizations, primarily through the 501(c)(3) New Venture Fund and the 501(c)(4) Sixteen Thirty Fund. Many of these organizations are pop-up organizations that exist for the duration of an election cycle while others spin off to become independent nonprofits.

The alliance—an \$80 million, five-year initiative—opened applications for local election offices to get training for at least two years on the election process and be certified “U.S. Centers for Election Excellence” upon completion.

In the “Frequently Asked Questions” portion of the website—perhaps recalling the criticism over the Zuckerberg money—the alliance says it will give “guidance and resources” to election officials criticized for accepting the national money.

“As part of the alliance, centers will receive training, mentorship, and resources, and serve as a support system for each other and election departments across the country,” the website says.

Local election officials are the expert on what their voters need, and the alliance will work with each center to fill in the gaps. This could look like redesigning a form so it’s more likely a voter will successfully complete it or updating an election website so it is mobile-friendly and answers voters’ top questions.

Besides the formerly Zuckerberg-aligned CTCL and the Arabella-sponsored CSME, the other partner organizations have left-leaning ties.

One partner is the Elections Group, a consulting firm run by two former Democratic county elections officials to give “guidance” for election offices on ballot curing, all-mail elections systems, and ballot drop boxes. It was established in 2020 to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Center for Civic Design advocates for making the expanded mail-in voting used in 2020 a permanent feature of all future elections and has advised the National Vote



Credit: Omidyar Network. License: <https://bit.ly/3gc3cf>.

With funding from eBay founder Pierre Omidyar’s Democracy Fund, the Center for Civic Design focuses primarily on redesigning ballots to make voting easier for perceived Democrat constituencies, such as recent immigrants, ethnic minorities, and young people.

at Home Institute. With funding from liberal billionaire and eBay founder Pierre Omidyar’s Democracy Fund, this group focuses primarily on redesigning ballots to make voting easier for perceived Democrat constituencies, such as recent immigrants, ethnic minorities, and young people.

Other partners are the Hasso Plattner Institute of Design, located at Stanford University, part of the university’s school of engineering; the Prototyping Systems Lab, based at the University of California, Davis, which focuses on designing technology; and the U.S. Digital Response, started during the pandemic to help with state and local governments’ digital needs.

Given the background of most of these organizations, it seems difficult to believe their motives are purely benevolent. The groups generally support more mail-in voting, automatic voter registration, and same-day registration, with no partner groups seemingly concerned about election security measures such as voter ID.

A report by the election integrity watchdog Public Interest Legal Foundation said the CTCL won’t be deterred by a lack of Zuckerberg grants. “In fact, the CTCL is expanding. They are launching a new venture called the U.S.



Although Zuckerberg has bowed out on future election funding, that doesn't mean Big Tech is out.

Alliance for Election Excellence, which promises an \$80 million grant fund for local election officials to tap for aid,” the legal foundation report says. “This represents only a shallow representation of the parallel ecosystem of left-leaning nonprofits standing ready to financially support and augment government administration of elections.”

This “training” is likely to reflect the political views of the groups in the alliance. The alliance also has a lot of questions to answer about who is doing the training. While this is different than giving large sums of cash to an election office, someone is paying big money for these coaches to fan out to election offices across the United States. This seems to be a little more than an end run around the state Zuckerbucks bans.

Big Tech Funding for the Alliance

Although Zuckerberg has bowed out on future election funding, that doesn't mean Big Tech is out.

The primary financial backer of the U.S. Alliance for Election Excellence is the Audacious Project. It is a program of the TED Conference that Inside Philanthropy says includes

many of today's leading major donors and their grantmaking organizations, as well as other big-name foundations and sector heavyweights. “It's a tech-heavy group of funders that lean liberal in their grantmaking, though there's plenty of variation in the kinds of work they support and where it falls on the ideological spectrum,”

The major backers of the Audacious Project that will bankroll most of the U.S. Alliance for Election Excellence are

- The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, aligned with the Microsoft founder and his ex-wife;
- MacKenzie Scott (ex-wife of Amazon founder Jeff Bezos) and her current husband Dan Jewett;
- Ballmer Group, the charity of retired Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer;

- The Laura and John Arnold Foundation, started by hedge fund manager John Arnold and his wife;
- Pivotal Ventures, a charity started by Melinda Gates;
- The MacArthur Foundation, one of the largest foundations in the U.S., which backs mostly left-leaning causes; and
- The Bridgespan Group, which does consulting work for nonprofits, including Planned Parenthood, NPR, and the Rockefeller Foundation.

The Arabella-sponsored Science Philanthropy Alliance is also a member of the Audacious Project. Other members include the Skoll Foundation, Virgin Unite, ELMA Philanthropies, and the Valhalla Charitable Foundation.

What we don't know is whether taxpayer dollars will help fund the effort to bend election offices to the left.

President Joe Biden signed an executive order in March 2021, and his administration is still implementing an “all-of-government” effort to boost voter registration and participation. The administration has been secretive about how it is implementing the actions, but the order itself says the federal government will focus on “distributing voter registration and vote-by-mail ballot application forms and providing access to applicable state online systems for individuals who can take advantage of those systems” and “soliciting and facilitating approved, nonpartisan third-party organizations and state officials to provide voter registration services on agency premises.”

The administration has thus far ignored inquiries for information from both the news media and government watchdog groups about which nonprofit groups will be working with the administration and what are the criteria. But Americans have good reason to be skeptical about claims of nonpartisanship.

With or without tax dollars, the notion that big money left-wing organizations are stepping to push local elections offices toward a certain partisan bent should concern both sides. The Left may benefit today, but such a precedent could come back to bite them.

In some ways, the creation of these politicized dark money outfits harkens back to the big city Democrat machines of legend, such as Tammany Hall in New York and the Daley Machine in Chicago, that made the vote counters a key part of the smooth-running political infrastructure to ensure Democrats maintain power.

“Dark money liberal advocacy groups will stop at nothing to inject partisan funds into election administration efforts,” said Rep. Claudia Tenney (R-NY) and co-chairwoman of the House Election Integrity Caucus.

“They did it in 2020 with Zuckerbucks, and they are continuing to find ways to do it today,” Tenney continued.

Let’s call this what it really is—a blatant attack on the security and integrity of the fairness and transparency of our elections. As co-chair of the House Election Integrity Caucus, I am working every day to hold these dark money groups accountable, expose their shady tactics, and keep partisan influence operations out of election administration. ■

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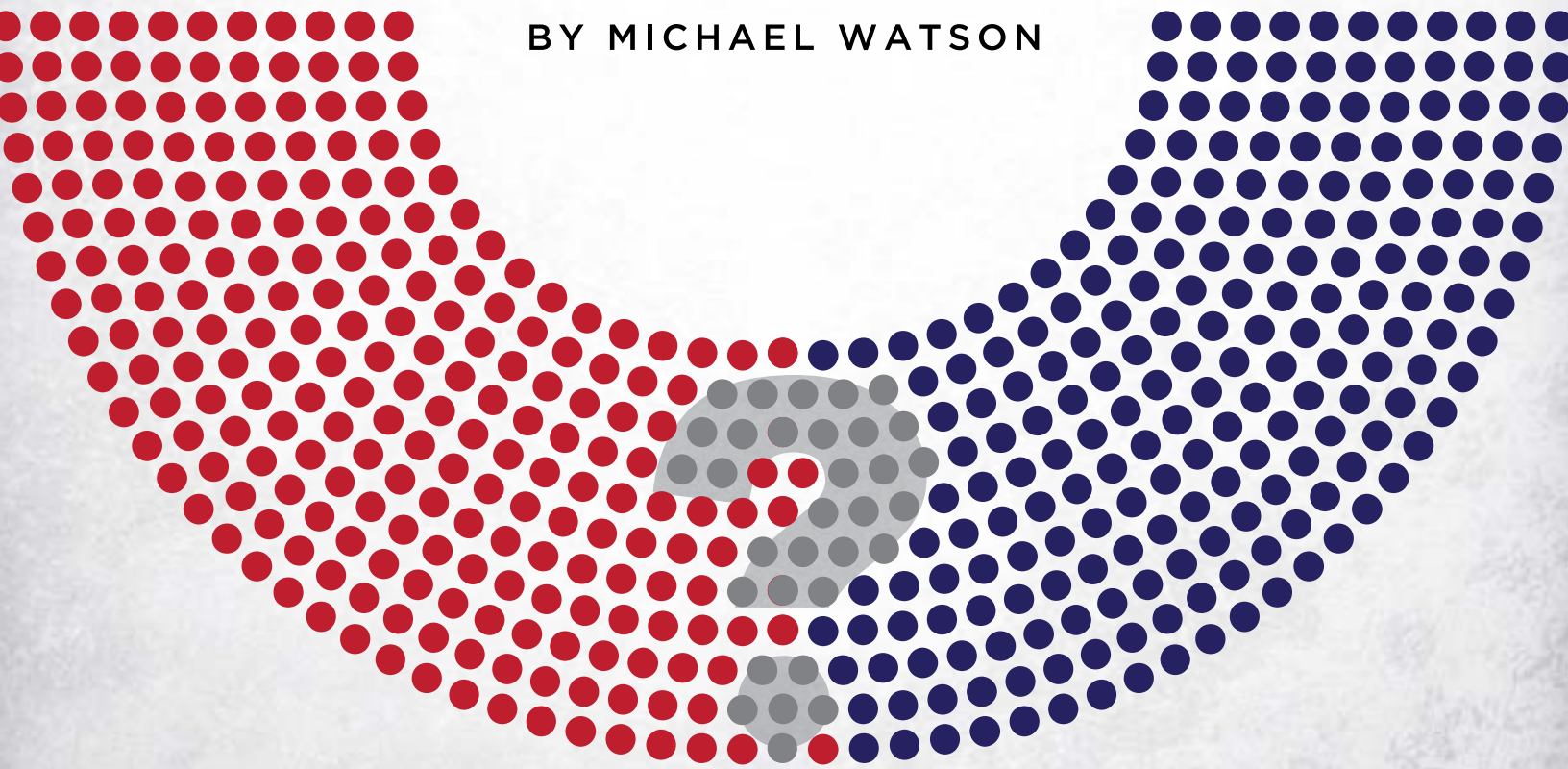
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(Mark Zuckerberg) If there is a discernable link between Run for Something and the forces behind the U.S. Alliance for Election Excellence, it would be \$10,000 in donations from the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative to Run for Something.

THE MYTH OF NON-PARTISAN DISTRICTS:

AN EXPERIMENT IN REDISTRICTING REFORM

BY MICHAEL WATSON



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