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Invasion of the  
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Capital Research Center  
1513 16th Street NW  
Washington, DC 20036  
202.483.6900  
[CapitalResearch.org](http://CapitalResearch.org)  
[Contact@CapitalResearch.org](mailto:Contact@CapitalResearch.org)

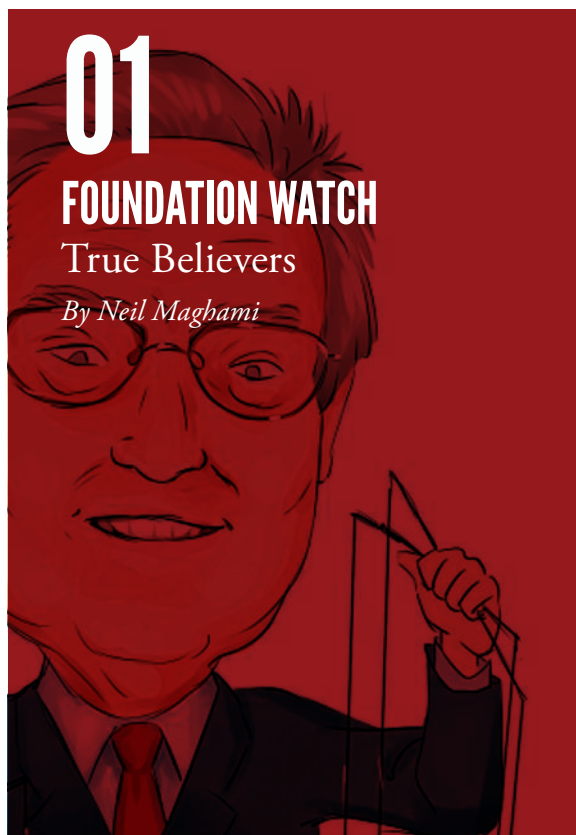
Internship inquiries are welcome.

Publisher, Scott Walter  
Editor, Kristen Eastlick  
Senior Editors, Matthew Vadum & Dr. Steven J. Allen  
Photo Editor, Gayle Yiotis



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## TRUE BELIEVERS

George Soros and the religious Left's war on President Trump

By Neil Maghami

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**Summary:** “Resist!” is the battle cry of many Hillary Clinton supporters stung by their candidate’s unanticipated loss to Donald Trump. Elements of the religious left that draw funding from George Soros’s foundations go one step further—they actively attack President Trump and his agenda.

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Despite the obvious political differences between President Donald Trump and left-wing plutocrat George Soros, they agree on one fundamental matter: these two self-made billionaires both like to think big. Trump expresses this basic credo in his 1987 book, *The Art of the Deal*: “To me it’s very simple: If you’re going to be thinking anyway, you might as well think big.”

Soros, a mega-donor to radical organizations, also likes to think big. So when he publicly calls President Trump “an impostor and a con man and a would-be dictator”—as he did this past January—it’s not merely another sour-grapes throw-away line from a disappointed Clintonite. Indeed, given the massive size of Soros’s Open Society Foundations, the nearly limitless nature of his resources, the dozens of tax-exempt groups nurtured by his philanthropy, and the thousands of hardcore activists drawn into his orbit, this statement is best understood as a declaration of open war against President Trump.

If the characterization of “open war” sounds hyperbolic or alarmist, think again: Even the less than conservative *New York Times* noted that 50 of the organizations involved in January’s anti-Trump demonstrations had a funding link to the Soros apparatus. This disquieting factoid can be run to ground in “Billionaire George Soros has ties to more than 50 ‘partners’ of the Women’s March on Washington,” in the *Times*’ Women in the World supplement of January 20.

In 2015 alone, Soros’s Foundation to Promote Open Society made a total of \$431 million in contributions and grants to far-left groups and causes around the world. What good is funding radical organizations on that scale if it doesn’t cover at least a few rent-a-mobs that can assemble in the



Credit: Insider Monkey(insidemonkey.com). License: <https://goo.gl/RomxE>.

*The New York Times* noted that 50 of the organizations involved in January’s anti-Trump demonstrations had a funding link to the Soros apparatus.

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streets on short notice? While Capital Research Center has for more than a decade regularly shined a spotlight on the Hungarian-born billionaire’s political activities, the ever-expanding Soros-Trump confrontation offers an opportunity to recalibrate. Questions loom, most as urgent as the following: How do we assess the political impact of the vast, half-hidden empire of Soros-sustained nonprofit groups?

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*Neil Maghami is a freelance writer and regular contributor to CRC publications.*

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To provide a refreshed view of this matter, the current issue of *Foundation Watch* will focus on Soros's foundations' grants to various religiously-oriented U.S. nonprofit organizations. The objectives behind the Hungarian born billionaire's deliberate efforts to nurture political radicalism can be better understood by taking a closer look.

## BEGINNING WITH CLEAR VISION

First, we need to discard the usual illusions that seem to crop up in mainstream media coverage of Soros and his role in American politics. *Newsweek*, for example, paints him as a much-maligned philanthropist, a “hate magnet” and punching bag for conservatives who, they say, have never forgiven him for taking such a public role in fostering opposition to the policies of President George W. Bush. To the reporters of *Newsweek* and their ilk, all criticism of Soros, purely partisan, has nothing to do with the support offered through his philanthropies to activists promoting the most corrosive brand of identity politics—as exemplified by the Black Lives Matter movement. Mainstream media discourse will simply not allow reasonable observers to take exception to Soros's radical activities. Forget that he promotes a worldview that is ultimately fatal to American democracy. Rational criticism of Soros, apparently, doesn't exist; to his supporters in the mainstream media, it's all just “hate” and noise.

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*50 of the organizations involved in January's anti-Trump demonstrations had a funding link to the Soros apparatus.*

Meanwhile, few journalists draw a connection between his campaign donations (\$21 million in federal contributions last year, according to OpenSecrets.org) and his foundations' support for left leaning nonprofit groups. This is a powerful combination, a one-two punch. Often, journalists simplistically focus on one or another aspect of Soros's foundation funding—marijuana legalization, for example—without following the links to other aspects of his philanthropic activity.

Why does Soros lavish so much money on U.S. tax-exempt groups? Not to boost his ego, surely; and not to win himself plaudits for parting with a considerable portion of his wealth to advance his ideas. The real reason likely has to do with a cunning understanding of the role these groups serve in American society.



Credit: Adil Nurmakan. License: <https://goo.gl/yUshOc>.

*Soros's nonprofit, Open Society Foundations, influences many vital issue areas, allowing him to assert his radical view into the public policy process, and groups become addicted to the support.*

In a fascinating 2005 article for *Non-Profit Quarterly*, anthropologist Axel Aubrun and linguist Joseph Grady looked at what they called “a less widely recognized” aspect of the function of American non-profit groups, in terms of shaping public discussion in our democracy:

The role of a third sector in American society in helping the public understand issues is less widely recognized. As Alexis de Tocqueville pointed out a century and a half ago, organizations that are neither commercial nor governmental play a critical role in the American democratic process. By identifying and promoting public interest issues, he argued, “voluntary associations” allow the public to make collective choices about issues that would otherwise have escaped the democratic process. They feed the machine of democracy.

As society, science, and technology become more complex, it becomes increasingly apparent that a key part of “identifying and promoting” the issues is explaining them, and so a more specific role has emerged for nonprofits: namely, to help bridge the explanatory gap. Nonprofits are well-positioned for the role, since they have the expertise and the means to introduce issue-explanations into the national conversation, by passing explanations along to the media when their issue “hits the news,” for example. Importantly, this role transcends particular issues—it concerns the health of American democracy as a whole.



Now consider the above in terms of Soros and his foundations: When media are covering news stories at election time and seek to explain some complex policy point, Soros's generous funding means there's always an Open Society Foundations-linked group ready to answer reporters' calls and emails on just about any conceivable issue. In the U.S. alone, Open Society Foundations are providing grants in many key areas, among them justice, drug policy, equality, democracy, economic advancement, national security, and human rights.

To paraphrase Aubrun and Grady, grants from the Open Society Foundations influence many vital issue areas, allowing Soros to assert his views and the views of his intellectual cronies. These views are thus mainlined directly into the veins of the democratic process; in this metaphorical model, the media is the "pusher," the groups Soros's foundations support, the "supplier."

Soros's foundations' support for radical media outlets, documentary film makers, and others attempting to mold public opinion provides him with additional influence—an issue examined in depth in "Media Matters for the Left" in the December 2014 *Organization Trends*. Between election cycles, "explanations" of topical hot-button issues offered by Soros-funded nonprofits assume a heightened importance: Constant repetition of his perspective across multiple media channels over many months creates a kind of liberal earworm that can colonize the thinking of media consumers unaware of the nuances of policy.

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*Open Society Foundations grants allow Soros to assert his views directly into the veins of the democratic process.*

The priority of cultivating faith groups as key game pieces on the Soros chessboard becomes clear in light of the above. Consider how much more powerful an explanation of a policy issue becomes, especially with religious audiences, when it can be mated to a faith-based moral narrative. Do not conclude, however, that Soros or the staff of his foundations have a special regard for religious organizations. The latter are mere conveniences, pre-assembled vehicles bearing Soros's political concerns at top speed down the highways of the democratic process.

## FAITH IN PUBLIC LIFE

Founded in 2005 and based in Washington, D.C., Faith in Public Life (FIPL) reported revenues of \$2.252 million for 2015. Between 2012 and 2015, it received approximately \$1.7 million in grants from Soros's Foundation to Promote Open Society.

FIPL calls itself a "strategy center advancing faith in the public square as a positive and unifying force for justice, compassion and the common good." Another strategic goal is to "change the narrative about the role of faith in politics, successfully countering the Religious Right and advancing social justice."

If the reference to the "Religious Right" isn't enough of a hint regarding FIPL's politics, then there's always the fact that the Rev. Jennifer Butler, its executive director, also served as chairman of the White House Council on Faith and Neighborhood Partnerships during the Obama administration. If public criticism of the Trump administration were an Olympic sport, Rev. Butler would be a gold medal winner many times over.

FIPL has engaged in a variety of energetic anti-Trumpian shenanigans since the election. Here are a few of the more egregious examples: On November 26, 2016, FIPL released a public letter signed by 1,500 clergy condemning President Trump's "cabinet of bigotry" for the "ambassadors of hatred, bigotry and intimidation." On January 9, 2017, it organized a "moral march" of 200 "moral leaders" at the U.S. Capitol to oppose Jeff Sessions's nomination as attorney general. A couple of weeks later, under the imprimatur of John Gehring (FIPL's Roman Catholic program director), the group assumed an apostolic tone, circulating an op-ed claiming that "People of faith who want to give moral cover to Trump's actions turn their backs on Jesus." On February 1, they published a letter signed by 4,000 clergy condemning "any policy change that would bar refugees based on their religion or nationality [from re-settling in the U.S.]" On March 2, they held a press conference calling for Attorney General Jeff Sessions to resign; four days later, they held another press conference to "condemn President Trump's new executive order banning the entry of immigrants and visitors from Muslim-majority countries." In April, they organized a prayer vigil in Washington, D.C., "to urge Congress to reject President Trump's sinful and immoral federal budget proposal, which makes deeply destructive cuts to programs that address human needs in order to increase Pentagon spending."

In other words, FIPL, aided by Soros's generosity, has been very busy indeed.



*Rev. Jennifer Butler and FIPL take credit for putting many religious leaders of the radical left in touch with media to support liberal policies.*

Beyond grabbing news headlines, FIPL is also focused on “building networks of clergy in key states—as well as a faith leadership pipeline—that can win local and national policy victories.” It claims to have contact with about 35,000 clergy across America, and takes credit for putting many of these leaders in touch with media with the goal of “helping shape national policy debates.”

To further this agenda, the group published “Toward a Politics of the Golden Rule,” a 12-page voter’s guide for the 2016 election cycle, endorsed by some 200 religious leaders representing various Christian, Jewish, and Muslim organizations. The guide focuses on the economy, global warming, immigration, gun violence, racial justice, and national security—undergirded by a FIPL website, [faithfulvoter.org](http://faithfulvoter.org), to further disseminate the voter guide. Separate from, but equal in importance to the “Golden Rule” voter’s guide, FIPL helped create another voter’s guide directed specifically at Catholics, grandly entitled “A Revolution of Tenderness: A 2016 Election Pope Francis Voter Guide.”

While FIPL is ecumenical in nature, it singles out the American Catholic community for special attention. FIPL’s 2015 IRS filing discloses that it spent \$224,613 “in preparation for Pope Francis’ visit to the U.S.” by commissioning “extensive opinion research on a broad range of issues.” The survey findings were later republished on the Open Society Foundations’ website. No doubt this information proved valuable during the planning of “Revolution of Tenderness.” FIPL called the Pope’s visit “a tremendous opportunity to help foster progressive change” and noted that “the AFL–CIO, the Service Employees International Union, and community organizing groups [held] scores of events around the country exploring the

pope’s statements on inequality.” They also called for “a nationwide day of prayer during [the Pope’s] time stateside, and asked Congress to take up immigration reform anew.”

In June 2013, another intervention by FIPL into Catholic matters took the form of a pamphlet entitled, quizzically, “Be Not Afraid?” The pamphlet criticizes the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD), a once-reliable source of funding for “grassroots community organizing,” for giving into pressure from “conservative Catholic activists and their ideological allies on the political right” and defunding various organizations for political reasons. *Foundation Watch*’s September 2009 issue offers a cogent analysis of this situation in “Left-Wing Radicalism in the Church: The Catholic Campaign for Human Development.”

In 2011, “Be Not Afraid?” asserted that a radical group called the North Bay Organizing Project (NBOP), based in Santa Rosa, Calif., sought to renew its funding relationship with CCHD. Instead, the latter withdrew its funding completely from the organization. The authors of “Be Not Afraid?” suggest that the newly appointed bishop of the diocese of Santa Rosa, Robert Vasa, had had an important role in this denial of funding. They claim Vasa, in conversation with an NBOP leader, had expressed his personal distaste for what he termed NBOP’s “Alinsky-style organizing.” This reference to Saul Alinsky, provocateur extraordinaire and the ideological father of much of the “community organizing” tactics so beloved of radical groups is disconcertingly apt. (CRC senior vice president Matthew Vadum’s book *Subversion, Inc.* offers an in-depth discussion of Alinsky and his methods.)

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*FIPL helped create a voter’s guide directed at Catholics entitled “A Revolution of Tenderness: A 2016 Election Pope Francis Voter Guide.”*

The blatant fellow-traveler tone of the FIPL pamphlet, however, is strong. Allegiance to Alinsky’s methods they suggest, appears to be a key reason, why CCHD *should* fund groups such as NBOP.

FIPL is not the only way that the Foundation to Promote Open Society has sought to build influence within the Catholic community. In 2015, it provided a total of \$970,000 to the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, for example. That’s on top of \$150,000 in 2014. Two other



*Through the tentacles of his many foundations, George Soros has invested billions of dollars to mobilize activist organizations.*  
(Chris Stone, president, Open Society Foundations)

groups that have received Soros funding are Catholics United and Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good, which were profiled in the article “Rallying the Catholic Left,” in *Organization Trends*, July 2012.

## TRAINING AND ORGANIZING

Another important aspect of FIPL’s work has to do with providing training to religious leaders who wish to “become game-changers in public policy debates and in our culture.” FIPL points the way with advocacy, messaging, and media strategy. It also organizes webinars teaching participants about, for example, “strategies for addressing controversial political issues from the pulpit in an effective, nonpartisan manner.” Forget that legislating from the pulpit has long been frowned upon in American religious life.

In addition to its focus on clergy, FIPL supports an outreach arm dedicated to fostering an “online activist network [of] faith activists.” This aspect of FIPL ops, known as FaithfulAmerica.org, has been an independent entity since 2013. It is not clear exactly how many people participate in FaithfulAmerica.org’s mischief, which consists mainly of promoting online petitions attacking an institution or prominent personality for being out of step with the religious left. Here’s a brief example of their polemics, a 2014 petition protesting congressional Republicans’ views of unemployment benefits that begins as follows:

“Rep. Paul Ryan talks a lot about his Catholic faith, but it doesn’t seem like he’s been paying much attention to Pope Francis...” Etc.

Though it claims more than 210,000 supporters, FaithfulAmerica.org has difficulties mustering even 10 percent of that figure for many of its petitions, as a review of the website clearly reveals.

## PICO NATIONAL NETWORK

Calling itself “a national network of faith-based community organizations working to create innovative solutions to problems facing urban, suburban and rural communities,” PICO is active in more than 20 states. It was originally known as the “Pacific Institute for Community Organization” but later characterized the acronym as standing for “People Improving Communities Through Organizing.” Whatever the meaning of their acronym, between 2012 and 2015, PICO received \$1.6 million from the Foundation for Promotion of Open Society.

PICO’s talk of “innovative solutions” sounds innocent enough, but look a little deeper and this organization’s sharp edges become frighteningly apparent. Like Faith in Public Life, PICO has already engaged in a long list of actions against the Trump administration, all duly announced by press release, and complete with instructions detailing media contacts for further information. PICO’s strident press releases—weekly since January—highlight allegations of misconduct by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and falsely characterize ICE’s raids as the systematic and deliberate “terrorization of immigrant communities” committed in the name of President Trump’s agenda.

*PICO’s press releases characterize ICE’s raids as the systematic and deliberate “terrorization of immigrant communities” committed in the name of President Trump’s agenda.*

Fr. John Baumann, SJ, founded PICO in 1972 after working in Chicago between his first and second year of seminary training. There, Baumann had extensive contact with the infamous Saul Alinsky. In a 2014 interview published by Holy Names University in Oakland, Calif., Baumann spoke about Alinsky in glowing terms:

Saul Alinsky was one of the people who delivered a workshop for us, and he was a fascinating person. The way he could describe the importance of *how to make democracy work in our communities* [emphasis added] and the importance of bringing people together was remarkable...So with that



experience, with the workshops that Alinsky gave, we were given placements. And my field placement was under the direction of Tom Gaudette, who was an Alinsky lieutenant.

Gaudette, Baumann added, had been “really helpful in being a mentor to me over the years.”

But Gaudette was no mere “lieutenant” in Alinsky’s service; rather one of his chief devils. Gaudette trained directly under Alinsky to learn the latter’s techniques of “community organizing.” Gaudette also worked close with Msgr. John J. Egan, another Chicago-based Alinsky ally.

PICO National Network is not the only religiously-oriented, pro-Alinsky organization on the Open Society grantee list. There’s also the Gamaliel Foundation, which has received \$550,000 from the Foundation to Promote Open Society since 2012. For more on Gamaliel, and its links to President Obama, see the article “The Gamaliel Foundation: Alinsky-Inspired Group Uses Stealth Tactics to Manipulate Church Congregations,” in the July 2010 *Foundation Watch*.

## SAMUEL DEWITT PROCTOR CONFERENCE

Founded in 2003, Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference’s (SDPC) mission statement calls it to “nurture, sustain, and mobilize the African American faith community in collaboration with civic, corporate, and philanthropic leaders to address critical needs of human and social justice within local, national, and global communities. SDPC seeks to strengthen the individual and collective capacity of thought leaders and activists in the church, academy, and community through education, advocacy, and activism.”

The SDPC received approximately \$900,000 from Soros’s Foundation to Promote Open Society between 2012 and 2015.

The most important event on their calendar is the annual Clergy and Lay Leadership Conference, which took place in Richmond, Va., back in February. In his biography of Barack Obama, David Maraniss calls the SDPC “an alliance of big-named preachers from around the country who saw it as their responsibility to set the agenda for the black community.” Named for a former pastor emeritus of the Abyssinian Baptist Church of New York City, the group’s founders included none other than Dr. Jeremiah A. Wright, Jr. Yes, the same Rev. Wright, notorious for his extremist rhetoric, who served for so many years as a spiritual advisor to President Obama. With his passionate attachment to “black liberation” theology and all the separatism that implies, Rev. Wright can certainly be ranked among the

foremost ideologues of contemporary identity politics. See the article “Barack Obama: A Radical Leftist’s Journey from Community Organizing to Politics,” in *Foundation Watch*, June 2008, for more on Rev. Wright.

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*His passionate attachment to “black liberation” theology, and all the separatism that implies, ranks Rev. Wright among the foremost ideologues of contemporary identity politics.*

On April 19 of this year, SDPC co-hosted a webinar entitled: “Protecting Our Communities: A Community Guide to Resisting the Trump Budget.” Participants were offered a chance to learn about “a new set of communications tools that will powerfully inform the language and the arguments we will need to push back against the current federal budget proposal.” Joining SDPC in organizing this webinar were the Center for Community Change (CCC) and the National Priorities Project (NPP). CCC coordinates community organizing development efforts at a national level, while NPP exists to circulate critiques of federal spending, particularly on defense. Both CCC and NPP are recipients of Soros money. CCC has received more than \$1.5 million since 2012, while NPP has taken in \$200,000 during the same period.

These two organizations aren’t the only connections between SDPC and the Soros octopus. SDPC’s 2013-2015 biennial report includes a page where the organization thanks its “key program partners.” Included in these acknowledgments are the Open Society Foundations, the PICO National Network, and the Drug Policy Alliance (DPA). In 2012, the DPA, long a Soros darling, received a 10-year financial commitment for a total of \$50 million from the Open Society Foundations “to advance drug policy reform.” DPA now serves as Soros’s primary henchman to push for the legalization of marijuana at the state level and federal level, and also internationally.

In June 2013, SDPC and the Alliance jointly organized a two-day gathering of black clergy called “A View from the Pulpit: Faith Leaders and Drug Decriminalization.” The conference represented a significant breakthrough for the Alliance, in that it offered the organization a forum to link the rate of incarceration for African-Americans to America’s drug laws and argue that decriminalization of marijuana

would address the injustice of this supposedly disparate impact on African-American communities. The argument has resonated with many black clergy and won DPA new vocal allies in its policy fights.

The relationship between the two groups remains strong. In November 2016, SDPC joined the Alliance and other organizations to hold a public conference call with media opposing the confirmation of Jeff Sessions as Attorney General. The invitation to the call attacked Sessions for his alleged plans to “expand mass criminalization and drug war policies that will put communities at risk and intensify the marginalization and stigmatization of Muslims, immigrants and others.”

“*“Success” seems a strange word to describe something that leaves Americans less secure and more vulnerable to terrorist attacks.*”

As for PICO National and SDPC, they continue to enjoy close ties, exemplified through their joint announcement on Feb. 2, 2017. Alongside the ACLU and others, they launched an initiative called “StopTrumpIntelPro,” a campaign to undermine President Trump’s plans to shore up domestic security and immigration enforcement by convincing local law enforcement not to cooperate with the FBI or other federal bodies.

StopTrumpIntelPro seeks to influence local law enforcement to follow the example of the San Francisco Police Department, which earlier this year ended its cooperation with the FBI’s Joint Terrorism Task Force. “San Francisco’s success is a model for local resistance to Trump’s plans,”

the campaign’s website loudly proclaims. Though “success,” by this definition, seems a strange word to describe something that leaves Americans less secure and more vulnerable to terrorist attacks.

## CONCLUSION

Through the tentacles of his many foundations, George Soros has invested billions of dollars to mobilize activist organizations. His purpose is to help them amplify their views through new virtual technologies and ultra-aggressive media strategies. His money animates a series of groups like the Drug Policy Alliance and the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference which are mutually reinforcing on some issues, while connecting separately with distinct broad constituencies. The same goes for PICO National’s focus on immigration enforcement issues and FIPL’s work to bring together Christians, Muslims and others around various “progressive” causes.

No doubt the more political constituencies Soros and his foundation associates are able to combine through alliances between the organizations they back, the more power they will have to advance their agenda and shape public policy. Multiply this approach across the many geographies, issue areas, and demographic groups as profiled in Soros’s foundations’ grants, and a monster emerges: A meticulous, impeccably funded effort to influence public opinion on an unprecedented scale. This is the kind of big thing—or rather its negative reflection—referred to by President Trump when he wrote “If you’re going to be thinking anyway, you might as well think big.” ■

*Read previous articles from the Foundation Watch series online at [www.CapitalResearch.org/category/foundation-watch/](http://www.CapitalResearch.org/category/foundation-watch/).*



## A DIFFERENT KIND OF SERVICE

The healing efforts of Vets With A Mission

By Cameron Vest

**Summary:** *Some returning veterans of the Vietnam War find it difficult to fully come home from the battlefield. By returning to that war-torn country to help the South Vietnamese continue to rebuild, the nonprofit organization Vets With A Mission helps many former soldiers find healing through service.*

**“It just always felt like unfinished business. To me, Vietnam, personally, felt unfinished.”** - Phil Carney, (USMC 1969-1971)

The Vietnam War, even a half-century after the final, chaotic evacuation of Saigon that marked the end of U.S. military involvement, remains a difficult topic for many older Americans.

But if you were born in the 1990s like me, the Vietnam War is history, a distant event of no particular importance to daily life in the age of the Internet. What impressions I have of the conflict come from its portrayal in films like *Apocalypse Now*, snippets of '60's pop songs, and a few dry textbooks. Sure, the major dates were tossed into an AP history exam or two back in high school: If pressed, I can still rattle off the highlights—Guerrilla warfare, Viet Cong, Tet Offensive, protest marches, and violent political divisions at home; Lieutenant Calley and the My Lai Massacre.

I'm no military historian, but I can tell you what became clear to me about our war in Vietnam when I worked on Paladin Pictures' *By War & By God*—an award-winning documentary directed by Kent C. Williamson and produced in partnership with Vets With A Mission (VWAM). I learned the Vietnam War makes an unsatisfying narrative. It's a complex, half-forgotten story many Americans have eschewed in favor of a simpler one, in part because we can't agree on why we lost the war in the first place, and in part, I hope, because we're ashamed. We should be ashamed. And we should talk about why.



*The organization formed in 1988. In January of 1989, VWAM began its first outreach project in a polio orphanage in Ho Chi Minh City.*

*By War & By God* and its accompanying podcast trace the stories of several Vietnam veterans from the moment they first heard about the war, to the moment they first set boots on the ground, through their tours and service, and their traumatic return Stateside. The difference between *By War & By God* and, say, a John Wayne war flick is that our film doesn't end with our fighting boys safe and happy at home. As Chuck Ward, Executive Director of VWAM, observed: “It's a difficult thing coming back from war, whether you did just a little bit or you were there for two or three tours. And when you come home it's different, and you're different.”

“*It's a difficult thing coming back from war...when you come home it's different, and you're different.*”—Chuck Ward

Now, imagine it's 1975 and you're on your way home. You've watched friends and enemies die horribly. You've been ambushed, shot at, bombed; you've done some

*Cameron Vest works with Paladin Pictures on By War & By God in Charlottesville, Virginia.*

Credit: VWAM screenshot. License: <https://goo.gl/pkaT7m>.





*The difference between By War & By God and, say, a John Wayne war flick is that our film doesn't end with our fighting boys safe and happy at home.*

shooting. You've protected your flag and your comrades with necessary violence and sometimes in ways that might gnaw at your conscience. But all that's over with now. So you're on the carrier USS Nimitz, approaching San Francisco Bay; almost home after years spent fighting for your country. The proud ship sails under the Oakland Bay Bridge, and you can see people with signs on the catwalks above. At first you think they're friends and family members welcoming you home. But as you get closer you realize these are not friends at all, but antiwar protestors. Now you can see what's written on their signs: They say things like "Baby Killer!" and "Welcome Home Murderers." Suddenly muck of the most disgusting sort begins to fall on you: The protestors are actually dumping buckets of urine and fecal matter off the bridge! After all the grit and blood and bravery, after all those young lives lost on the battlefields of Vietnam in an attempt to keep the South Vietnamese free from Marxist-Communist oppression, this insult is what you come home to.

*"All of us were emotional basket cases...I had a really messed up life for the next two or three years...just an angry, angry person."—Bob Peragello*

This story is not an embroidered fantasy, not a hypothetical. It's Chuck Ward's real story. And his words still sound a note of bewilderment after all these years: "How in the world do you treat people that way?" he said. "It was disgusting...I mean, talk about angry!"

Talk about angry, indeed. It boils my blood just to hear Chuck tell his story. So what does a returning veteran like Chuck do at that point? How do you talk about

your service? In a country run amuck, where the average liberal doesn't see returning heroes but baby killers, how do you seek the help that every returning veteran needs to readjust to civilian life? History tells us, sadly, that a lot of veterans didn't readjust at all. Bob Peragello, another veteran interviewed for the film, says "All of us were emotional basket cases...[W]e were some of the first returning vets from the Vietnam War. I had a really messed up life for the next two or three years—drinking, carousing, fighting...just an angry, angry person." Roger Helle, also interviewed, says of his own traumatic return home: "I was in an emotional, psychological wilderness of not understanding PTSD, not understanding survivor's guilt. I was proud of serving my country, of being a Marine, so I wore that mask for about four and a half years...unfortunately my life began to unravel."

*"You've just said the four sweetest words I've ever heard from you....You said, 'My war is over.'" —Mrs. Bill Steele*

Some veterans turned to booze, some to drugs. While suicide rates among Vietnam veterans are still debated, the *Military Times* reports that suicide rates among veterans in general are 21 percent higher than among the civilian population. A few vets, like Cal Dunham, "couldn't shake the fact that [they] needed to be responsible in some way to help correct what war does." That flash of inspiration led him, like other men profiled in *By War & By God*, to turn to faith to pull him through his dark night—and, because faith must be supported by deeds—to a different kind of service.

Vets With A Mission was the particular vision of Bill Kimball, who served with the 1st Cavalry as a Mortarman during the 1968 Tet Offensive. The organization formed in 1988; in January of 1989, VWAM began its first outreach project in a polio orphanage in Ho Chi Minh City. Bill's overwhelming desire was to see American Vietnam veterans return to Vietnam to help in the rebuilding of a country that had suffered immense destruction to its infrastructure over the course of the war, and to minimize the effect of this destruction on our former South Vietnamese allies, and on all Vietnamese in general. In the official report of that first mission, VWAM states: "It was not unusual to see a tough former Marine with tears in his eyes, holding one of the [orphaned children] in his arms."

Since its inception, VWAM has built thirty-two rural health stations or medical clinics in Vietnamese cities, established training programs with native doctors, worked with local churches, invested over \$3 million in Vietnam, and sent over 2,500 veteran and non-veteran volunteers back to the country to help. “Vets go to Vietnam, with Vets With A Mission,” Chuck explains. “They meet their former enemy. They meet the people. And reconciliation comes full circle from the terrible memories of 1968 or 1969, to discovering the war is really over.”

Bill Steele’s war experience—he’s also on the VWAM executive board—involved a pitched battle on the Mekong Delta where a number of his fellow soldiers were killed. During his VWAM “tour” of Vietnam he had the opportunity to visit the remote location where that ambush had taken place. Upon returning from the combat zone, Steele immediately called his wife. Toward the end of the conversation she said: “You’ve just said the four sweetest words I’ve ever heard from you.” Bill thought about this for a moment: “But I just said *three* words: ‘I love you.’” “No,” his wife replied. “You said something else. You said, ‘My war is over.’”



*The work of these veterans in Vietnam hinges on the power of redemptive moments: the enemy combatant embracing an American soldier, and the soldier returning to a scene of former trauma in the name of service.*

The stories these vets tell about their military tours in Vietnam are often emotionally wrenching. But the stories they tell about their “Second Service” in that country are something else entirely. Bob Peragallo tells of sitting down to dinner with members of the Vietnamese People’s Committee and a small group from VWAM.



*“At first you think they’re friends and family members welcoming you home. But as you get closer you realize these are not friends at all, but antiwar protestors.” —Chuck Ward*

He describes meeting Mr. Son, President of the People’s Committee, who had a wooden leg, having lost his real one to machine gun fire in the war. Mr. Peragallo says:

“And I told the interpreter, I said, ‘Will you tell Mr. Son that I was a machine gunner?’ The interpreter didn’t want to do it. And, you know, it got real quiet and everybody got hushed. And the Vietnamese around us didn’t know what was going on. Finally, I said, ‘tell him.’ And so he told Mr. Son that I was a machine gunner and that I served in the Que Son Valley with the 9th Marines. And I looked over at Mr. Son, and he smiled and kind of grinned a little bit. Then I told the interpreter, I said, ‘I’d like to tell Mr. Son that I might have been the one that shot his leg off. But I want Mr. Son to know and understand that the war is over, and at one time we could have been, and probably were, former enemies engaged in combat. But now we’re here together, working together to improve the quality of health care for his commune.’ And Mr. Son stood up and he shook my hand. And Mr. Son hugged me.”

*“[M]en who would’ve never thought of talking to one another [are] saying, ‘let’s have a beer together, let’s get in touch, let’s keep in touch.’” —Chuck Ward*

*By War & By God*, VWAM, and the work of these veterans in Vietnam all hinge on just that kind of redemptive moment: there’s the enemy combatant embracing an American soldier; that soldier returning to the scene of former trauma in the name of service.

Since the legacy of the Vietnam War is, fundamentally, an unsatisfying narrative, VWAM has been founded to shape it into a redemptive one. Chuck describes those dinners with former enemies as “tense” at first, but “by the time that dinner is over...men who would’ve never thought of talking to one another [are] talking about their children, saying, ‘let’s have a beer together, let’s get in touch, let’s keep in touch.’”

I stated earlier in this essay that, as a nation, we ought to be ashamed about the Vietnam War: Yes, we ought to be ashamed of the way many in our country treated its veterans returning from the crucible of war. But shame is not enough. The caring veterans of VWAM found a greater humanity; a humanity that manifested itself in the desire to serve again, over and above the incredible military service they had rendered so long ago.

We can still learn from these men. Don’t be that protester on the Oakland Bay Bridge, bucket of night soil in hand. And don’t be quiet. Reach out. Watch our film, available on Amazon Prime. Listen to the podcast at [ByWarandByGod.com](http://ByWarandByGod.com). Visit [VetsWithAMission.com](http://VetsWithAMission.com). Donate whatever you can—money, time, words of support and encouragement, but most of all the latter. Support those now serving, and those who have served. Serve however *you* can. This is a call to action. As Chuck said: Get in touch. Keep in touch. ■

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# ORGANIZATION TRENDS



## TAKING BACK AMERICA THE CONSTITUTIONAL WAY

Is it time for a convention of the states?

By Matthew Vadum

**Summary:** *Convention of States Project aims to curb the powers of the long out-of-control federal government by pursuing a state-initiated convention to amend the Constitution. No such convention has ever occurred, although Article V of the Constitution permits the process. Many observers may suspect that this push is a fringe effort with little support. Yet serious scholars have begun to support it, and the group behind it has considerable—and growing—grassroots support.*

America is a mess. No matter who is in power, the government of the United States keeps getting bigger and less accountable to those it is supposed to serve. Elections, some opine, are largely meaningless. The nation's unpitying drift to the Left and to increasingly centralized, sclerotic, Western European-style governance with its cradle-to-grave welfare states seems unstoppable. To patriots—that is, to people who support limited government, individual rights, fiscal responsibility, and the rule of law, the future seems bleak.

It was never supposed to be this way.

The Constitution was supposed to protect Americans from what its principal architect, James Madison, termed in *Federalist* 48 an “ELECTIVE DESPOTISM,” spelling the phrase in all-caps so it screamed out from the page.

Today some observers fear we're sliding into just what Madison hoped to avoid. “The Statists have been successful in their century-long march to disfigure and mangle the constitutional order and undo the social compact,” author, broadcaster, and Landmark Legal Foundation president Mark Levin writes in his 2013 book, *The Liberty Amendments*.

“The nation has entered an age of *post-constitutional soft tyranny*,” he writes (*italics in original*). To explain the concept of “soft tyranny,” Levin quotes that great observer of American society, Alexis de Tocqueville, who warned in his classic study *Democracy in America* (1835) that a declining United States could produce a new kind of petty tyranny never before seen:



Credit: Gage Skidmore. License: <https://goo.gl/1XRcsi>.

Mark Levin: “The Statists have been successful in their century-long march to disfigure and mangle the constitutional order and undo the social compact.”

It covers the surface of society with a network of small complicated rules, minute and uniform, through which the most original minds and the most energetic characters cannot penetrate, to rise above the crowd. The will of man is not shattered, but softened, bent, and guided; men are seldom forced by it to act, but they are constantly restrained from acting. Such a power does not destroy, but it prevents existence; it does not tyrannize, but it compresses, enervates, extinguishes, and stupefies a people, till each nation is reduced to nothing better than a flock of timid and industrious animals, of which the government is the shepherd.

Matthew Vadum is senior vice president at the Capital Research Center. His next book, *Team Jihad*, will soon be published by the Center for Security Policy.

Tocqueville accurately predicted America's future, Levin argues. In modern America:

Social engineering and central planning are imposed without end, since the governing masterminds, drunk with their own conceit and pomposity, have wild imaginations and infinite ideas for reshaping society and molding man's nature in search of the ever-elusive utopian paradise. Their clumsy experiments and infantile pursuits are not measured against any rational standard. Their piousness and sanctimony are justification enough.

Congress is out of control, Levin writes, operating "not as the Framers intended, but in the shadows, where it dreams up its most notorious and oppressive laws, coming into the light only to trumpet the genius and earnestness of its goings-on and to enable members to cast their votes." Anyone who watches C-SPAN, with its gavel-to-gavel coverage of fat-cat elected officials endlessly congratulating themselves for their selfless public service, knows this is true.

Congress unconstitutionally delegates its powers to "a gigantic yet ever-growing administrative state that, in turn, unleashes on society myriad regulations and rules at such a rapid rate the people cannot possibly know of them, either—and if, by chance, they do, they cannot possibly comprehend them."

What was supposed "to be a relatively innocuous federal government, operating from a defined enumeration of specific grants of power, has become an ever-present and unaccountable force. It is the nation's largest creditor, debtor, lender, employer, consumer, contractor, grantor, property owner, tenant, insurer, health-care provider, and pension guarantor."

The federal government lords over both the states that came together in 1776 to form the United States and also those that were subsequently admitted to the Union. It routinely impinges on and overrules states' "rights"—a misnomer because they are actually *powers*—interfering in the lives of the people of those states.

The states' enfeeblement is reflected in the way no one calls this now grammatically singular sovereign entity *these* United States anymore. It is always *the* United States today. The states are treated as afterthoughts.

This goes against the intentions of the Framers, who "rightly insisted on preserving the prominent governing role of

Convention of States Project has a Legal Board of Reference composed of legal advisers. Among its members are:

- Mark Levin, nationally syndicated radio host, bestselling author, and president of Landmark Legal Foundation;
- Robert P. George, McCormick Professor of Jurisprudence at Princeton University;
- C. Boyden Gray, former White House Counsel;
- Andrew McCarthy, former U.S. Attorney and bestselling author;
- Randy E. Barnett, Carmack Waterhouse Professor of Legal Theory at the Georgetown University Law Center; and
- John C. Eastman, Henry Salvatori Professor of Law and Community Service at Chapman University Fowler School of Law.

the state legislatures as a crucial mechanism to containing the power" of the federal government, Levin writes. "In fact, other than the limited, specified powers granted to the federal government, the states retained for themselves plenary governing authority."

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*The Constitution aimed to...prevent the concentration of unbridled power in the hands of a relative few imperfect people.”*  
—Mark Levin

In *Federalist* 45 Madison argued, "The powers delegated by the proposed Constitution to the federal government are few and defined. Those which are to remain in the State governments are numerous and indefinite."

States, Levin admits, are not "perfect governing institutions." Many "are no more respectful of unalienable rights than is the federal government," but the Framers intended that the states retain for themselves "significant authority to ensure the republic's durability." The

Constitution aimed to diversify authority “with a combination of governing checks, balances, and divisions, intended to prevent the concentration of unbridled power in the hands of a relative few imperfect people.”

Over time, various government-limiting mechanisms in the Constitution that were intended as vital elements in the self-correcting American system fell into disfavor and disuse. As the republic aged, each successive generation cared slightly less about the contents of the Constitution, especially the parts that limited governmental power. Eventually, thanks largely to leftists, we reached a point at which Americans stopped being taught civics almost altogether, and interest in constitutional provisions came to be viewed as a quaint, anachronistic waste of time, like the false science of alchemy. The Left’s relentless push for government-provided security has over time eroded the support that many Americans feel for liberties and rights that the Founders took for granted.

## THE DESIRE FOR BOLD REFORMS

Drastic change is needed. The American people agree. This is why they elected to the White House a flamboyant, eccentric political novice who promised bold reforms. They want the Washington, D.C., “swamp” drained. They’re fed up and for good reason.

As America moves farther and farther from her founding principles, elections don’t count for much. “We keep changing personnel and hoping it will fix the problem but the problem is structural,” says Mark Meckler, president of Citizens for Self-Governance, the parent organization of the Convention of States Project.

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*Official Washington operates in the make-believe world of “baseline budgeting” where both a cut and an increase may count as cuts.*

“So if we put good people in, we still get bad results. We have a fiscal house that is a disaster. The federal government is out of control. It will never rein itself in.”

The fact that the federal government’s books are fiction doesn’t help. “There is nothing real about government accounting,” says Meckler. “We need a constitutional



*Alexis de Tocqueville warned in his classic study Democracy in America (1835) that a declining United States could produce a new kind of petty tyranny never before seen.*

amendment to impose generally accepted accounting principles on the feds.

Even when spending cuts are promised, overall federal spending continues on its upward trajectory because Official Washington operates in the make-believe world of “baseline budgeting.” According to this perverse method of accounting, both a cut and an increase may count as cuts.

Confused? You’re supposed to be.

Baseline budgeting allows politicians to pretend to reduce expenditures while they actually *boost* expenditures. As Citizens Against Government Waste explains, in D.C. jargon, “The baseline includes automatic adjustments for inflation and anticipated increases in program participation. Baseline, or current services, budgeting, therefore builds automatic, future spending increases into Congress’s budgetary forecasts.” So, if the federal budget is slated under the rules of baseline budgeting to rise by, say, \$1 trillion, but it rises only \$750 billion, the Congressional Budget Office will claim the budget has been “cut” by \$250 billion. The “cut” is really just a reduction in projected spending.

When I was a reporter in the D.C. bureau of *The Bond Buyer* newspaper, I regularly had run-ins with analysts at the left-wing Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP). An article I wrote in 2004 illustrates

Credit: Théodore CHASSERLAU (1819 - 1856).  
License: <https://goo.gl/1PYKIM>.



the cognitive dissonance that some Washingtonians can achieve. At that time President Bush proposed appropriating \$16.9 billion in Section 8 housing voucher subsidies for fiscal 2005, which was higher than the \$16.4 billion appropriated the previous year.

A sane person would look at the two figures and conclude that \$16.9 billion was \$500 million more than \$16.4 billion. But the leftists at the CBPP argued that after taking into account inflation and other factors, the \$16.9 billion would be a funding cut. Instead of being honest and saying that they believed the \$500 million wasn't enough of an increase, CBPP analysts lied, claiming the increase was a cut.

Official Washington radiates this kind of entitlement mentality, and that ugly sentiment shows no signs of abating. Unless, perhaps, a state-initiated constitutional convention takes place that fundamentally changes the way federal officials view your tax dollars.

## THE AMENDING PROCESS

The change that needs to happen could be accomplished by popular unrest generated by community organizers, by civil war and secession, or it could be accomplished peacefully by following an orderly, constitutionally prescribed process.

Amendments to the Constitution have been relatively rare, and a state-convened convention to propose amendments has never occurred, yet the Constitution itself allows for such drastic adjustments, and many sober jurists and statesmen have argued that the amending process can help if the nation begins to become disordered. Consider, for example, the views of Justice Joseph Story (1779-1845), a Supreme Court justice best known for writing the opinion in the *Amistad* case that Steven Spielberg immortalized in his movie of the same name. Story was also the author of the magisterial *Commentaries on the Constitution* (1833) and the son of a Boston Tea Partier.

Article V of the Constitution serves, Justice Story said, as a “safety valve” for American society because it allows changes to be made to the structure of the nation’s great national charter (*Commentaries on the Constitution* 3:§§1821-24). Story wrote that the need for an amending mechanism was self-evident:

A government, which, in its own organization, provides no means of change, but assumes to be fixed and unalterable, must, after a while, become wholly unsuited to the circumstances of the nation; and it will either degenerate into a despotism, or by the pres-

sure of its inequalities bring on a revolution. It is wise, therefore, in every government, and especially in a republic, to provide means for altering, and improving the fabric of government, as time and experience, or the new phases of human affairs, may render proper, to promote the happiness and safety of the people.

Similarly, the judicious St. George Tucker (1752-1827)—who published an influential early American version of *Blackstone’s Commentaries* and supported the emancipation of slaves—praised the Constitution because it “provides a safe, and peaceable remedy for its own defects, as they may from time to time be discovered” (*Blackstone’s Commentaries* 1: App. 371-72):

A change of government in other countries is almost always attended with convulsions which threaten its entire dissolution; and with scenes of horror, which deter mankind from any attempt to correct abuses, or remove oppressions until they have become altogether intolerable. In America we may reasonably hope, that neither of these evils need be apprehended; nor is there any reason to fear that this provision in the constitution will produce any degree of instability in the government; the mode both of originating and of ratifying amendments, in either mode which the constitution directs, must necessarily be attended with such obstacles, and delays, as must prove a sufficient bar against light, or frequent innovations.

America need not follow a violent, disruptive path in order to correct national problems.

In *Federalist* 43, Madison made the case to the American people for Article V’s formula for amending the Constitution. The at-the-time unratified Constitution, he wrote, “equally enables the general [today we would say, “federal”] and the state governments to originate the amendment of errors as they may be pointed out by the experience on one side or on the other.”

The people of the several states, represented by their state legislatures, needed to approve the original Constitution in order for it to take effect. This is as it should be, Madison wrote. The people “are the only legitimate fountain of power, and it is from them that the constitutional charter, under which the several branches of government hold their power, is derived” (*Federalist* 49).

Amendments to the Constitution should also have to be approved by the states: “it seems strictly consonant to the republican theory,” Madison continued, “to recur to the

same original authority”—that is, We the People—“not only whenever it may be necessary to enlarge, diminish, or new-model the powers of government; but also whenever any one of the departments may commit encroachments on the chartered authorities of the others.”

Article V empowers Congress to propose constitutional amendments, something it has done dozens of times. But it also contains a long-ignored provision that requires Congress to call a constitutional convention when the legislatures of two-thirds of the states—today, 34 of the 50 states—demand it, something that has never happened.

The actual wording of Article V states:

The Congress, whenever two thirds of both houses shall deem it necessary, shall propose amendments to this Constitution, or, on the application of the legislatures of two thirds of the several states, shall call a convention for proposing amendments, which, in either case, shall be valid to all intents and purposes, as part of this Constitution, when ratified by the legislatures of three fourths of the several states, or by conventions in three fourths thereof, as the one or the other mode of ratification may be proposed by the Congress; provided that no amendment which may be made prior to the year one thousand eight hundred and eight shall in any manner affect the first and fourth clauses in the ninth section of the first article; and that no state, without its consent, shall be deprived of its equal suffrage in the Senate.

To come into force, the amendments would have to be ratified either by 38 state legislatures or by 38 state constitutional ratification conventions. Congress gets to decide which method of ratification will be used.

The provision allowing states to call a convention to amend the Constitution is “excellent,” St. George Tucker wrote, even though he felt it may never be used:

The latter will probably never be resorted to, unless the federal government should betray symptoms of corruption, which may render it expedient for the states to exert themselves in order to the application of some radical and effectual remedy.

According to Meckler, the day Tucker said would likely never arrive has come, which makes a convention of states necessary.

“We are trying to throttle back the authority of the federal government,” Meckler said in an interview. “This is the only way to erase 115 years of ‘Progressive’ gains.”

Levin concurs that only a constitutional overhaul can fix America. He supports the state-initiated amendment process to limit the power and jurisdiction of the U.S. government that the Convention of States Project has launched.

Using plain, non-legalistic language, Levin writes that

...Article V expressly grants state legislatures significant authority to rebalance the constitutional structure for the purpose of restoring our founding principles should the federal government shed its limitations, abandon its original purpose, and grow too powerful, as many delegates in Philadelphia and the state conventions had worried it might.

“The Founders gave us a legitimate path to save our liberty by using our state governments to impose binding restraints on the federal government,” the Convention of States Project advises on its fact- and resource-rich website. “We must use the power granted to the states in the Constitution.”

Since it was launched in mid-2012, COS has made steady progress. On May 12, 2017, Missouri became the 12th state to adopt a Convention of States resolution. The measure, spearheaded by state Sen. Mike Kehoe, a Republican who represents Jefferson City, demands an Article V Convention of States to propose constitutional amendments “that impose fiscal restraint on the federal government, limit the power and jurisdiction of the federal government, and limit the terms of office for federal officials and members of Congress.”

“This is a big deal,” Mark Levin announced on his radio show. “We’re more than a third of the way there.”

“The American people are growing weary of a federal government that is operating outside of its Constitutional bounds,” Keith Carmichael, Missouri State Director for the Convention of States Project told *Conservative Review*.

“Neither party represents the people, but rather outside influences that help them get re-elected, so by calling a Convention of States under Article V, the states can recalibrate the balance between the federal government and return power back to the people—not to mention that a convention of this magnitude would be the biggest civics lesson of our lifetime.”

Days before Carmichael spoke, Texas became the 11th state to approve the COS-sponsored resolution.

The other ten states to approve the group’s Article V resolution are Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Louisiana, North Dakota, Oklahoma, and

Tennessee (“Texas joins call for Convention of States,” *WND*, May 9, 2017).

WND reports:

Roughly 125,000 COS activists worked for more than three years to pass the COS Article V Convention resolution in Texas. They conducted more than 400 meetings around the state to educate citizens and legislators about the Article V Convention process and the power they have to keep the federal government in check.

Meckler stressed the importance of educating people about the amendment process. “I would say the number one obstacle is just ignorance of the process,” he said. “The second clause of Article V is something that’s never been used before in American history, and there’s a lot of bad information and fearmongering floating around out there that’s spread primarily by the radical left, and people have bought into it. So overcoming that history of fearmongering is definitely not easy.”

## WHAT THE NAYSAYERS SAY

On the political Right, the late Phyllis Schlafly’s Eagle Forum and the John Birch Society oppose convoking a convention of the states.

In December 2008, Schlafly wrote a column titled, “Con Con Is a Terrible Idea”:

We already have a U.S. Constitution that has withstood the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune for more than two centuries, and we don’t need a new constitution. There is nothing wrong with the one we have except that politicians are not obeying it and judges are indulging in too much activism.

The idea that adding new words to the Constitution to require balancing the federal budget, or to give President Barack Obama a line-item veto so he can veto the extravagant spending he has already endorsed, is delusory. The only thing more outlandish is the fanciful notion that a 2009 Con Con could adopt such requirements while avoiding other mistakes.

Outside the convention hall, left-wing “demonstrators would hold court demanding constitutional changes.”

These would be staged by gay activists and their opponents, pro-abortionists and pro-lifers, radi-

cal feminists, the environmentalists, gun control advocates, animal rights extremists, D.C. Statehood agitators, those who want to relax immigration and those who would restrict it, mortgage defaulters, and the unions—all demanding consideration of amendments to recognize their claimed rights.

“

*“There is nothing wrong with the [Constitution] we have except that politicians are not obeying it and judges are indulging in too much activism.”*

—Phyllis Schlafly

It “would be a prescription for political chaos, controversy, confrontation, litigation, and judicial activism,” Schlafly wrote. “Just about the only thing we can predict with certainty is that it could not be secret from the media and the public, as was the original 1787 Constitutional Convention.”

The John Birch Society worries, in its words, that a “Con-Con” could become what critics call a “runaway convention,” “which could mean the end of over two centuries of security for our rights and freedoms as Americans.”

Arguably, this idea that a convention of the states would likely spin out of control originated on the Left. In 1988 the late Chief Justice Warren Burger wrote, “There is no effective way to limit or muzzle the actions of a Constitutional Convention. After a Convention is convened, it will be too late to stop the Convention if we don’t like its agenda.”

Creative left-wingers now try to claim the late Associate Justice of the Supreme Court, Antonin Scalia, a conservative and an originalist, as an ally in their fight against a convention of the states.

For example, the website of the leftist, George Soros-funded Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, contains a Jan. 18, 2017, article by Michael Leachman and David A. Super. The title of the piece sums up their perspective: “States Likely Could Not Control Constitutional Convention on Balanced Budget Amendment or Other Issues[.]”

Of course, that’s the whole purpose of the state-initiation clause of Article V. This extraordinary remedy was intended to give the people of the 50 states an opportunity to do an end-run around career politicians. The states, by which Leachman and Super mean the entrenched politicians, are



not supposed to have control of a convention of the states. The politicians are, after all, part of the problem.

In the article, the authors appear to misrepresent the views of Scalia as expressed three years ago by taking a vague statement that the famously witty jurist appeared to offer as a joke during a panel discussion alongside his friend and fellow high court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

A number of prominent jurists and legal scholars have warned that a constitutional convention could open up the Constitution to radical and harmful changes. For instance, the late Justice Antonin Scalia said in 2014, “I certainly would not want a constitutional convention. Whoa! Who knows what would come out of it?”

But Scalia’s views are not as clear-cut as the authors would have us believe. To understand what Scalia meant, consider the context of the remarks. He made them April 17, 2014, at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., during a panel discussion on the First Amendment.

Here is the relevant part from the transcript prepared by Federal News Service:

MR. KALB: Here is a question from Seth Dawson (sp) of the office of Congressman Denny Heck. Justice Stevens recently suggested a constitutional amendment to modify the Second Amendment. If you could amend the Constitution in one way, what would it be and why? Justice Scalia?

JUSTICE SCALIA: I certainly would not want a constitutional convention. I mean, whoa. (Laughter.) Who knows what would come out of that? But if there were a targeted amendment that were adopted by the states, I think the only provision I would amend is the amendment provision. I figured out at one time what percentage of the populace could prevent an amendment of the Constitution. And if you take a bare majority in the smallest states by population, I think something less than 2 percent of the people can prevent a constitutional amendment. That’s—it ought to be hard, but it shouldn’t be that hard.

Scalia was a strong supporter of the Second Amendment. The question came from a staffer in the office of left-wing Rep. Denny Heck, a Democrat in Washington State. Heck participated in the Democrats’ June 2016 publicity stunt in which they conducted a sit-in on the floor of the House of Representatives to demand more gun control. The



Credit: Steve Petteway, photographer, Supreme Court of the United States.  
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*Creative left-wingers now try to claim the late Associate Justice of the Supreme Court, Antonin Scalia, a conservative and an originalist, as an ally in their fight against a convention of the states.*

gimmicky event, organized by grandstanding leftist Rep. John Lewis of Georgia, received positive saturation coverage by the mainstream media, which largely depicted the floor occupiers as heroic crusaders.

Given that Scalia was known to be a keen follower of current affairs, is it any surprise that he would be startled enough by the question about enhanced gun-grabbing to say “whoa”? When he said, “I certainly would not want a constitutional convention,” was he thinking in general terms, or exclusively regarding the Second Amendment? In any event, the concluding part of Scalia’s remarks on this occasion clearly indicated that he did not think a tiny minority of Americans should be able to prevent the Constitution from being amended.

Years earlier Scalia was unequivocally in favor of having a convention of the states.

During a panel discussion on Article V at the American Enterprise Institute in 1979, then-law professor Scalia was enthusiastic about the prospect of a state-initiated convention to consider constitutional amendments. He gently mocked a questioner who raised concerns about “an unlimited convention.”

“It is possible,” he said, “that the Congress tomorrow might pass a law abolishing social security as of the next day, or

eliminating Christmas. Such things are possible, remotely possible.” He continued:

I have no fear that such extreme proposals would come out of a constitutional convention....it really comes down to whether we think a constitutional convention is necessary. I think it is necessary for some purposes, and I am willing to accept what seems to me a minimal risk of intemperate action. The Founders inserted this alternative method of obtaining constitutional amendments because they knew the Congress would be unwilling to give attention to many issues the people are concerned with, particularly those involving restrictions on the federal government’s own power. The Founders foresaw that and they provided the convention as a remedy. If the only way to get that convention is to take this minimal risk, then it is a reasonable one.... In any case, I do not have any great fear of an open convention, since three-quarters of the states do have to ratify what comes out of it.

## THE LEFT’S FEAR

Unlike Scalia, left-wing activists are almost uniformly terrified at the prospect and are beginning to take seriously the threat that the Convention of States Project poses to the big government status quo. They are responding with characteristic hysteria. For example, Jacob Sugarman wrote an article with the headline, “Convention of the States: Is a billionaire-funded coup to rewrite the Constitution on the verge of happening?” (Salon, March 25, 2017).

Sugarman warned that:

A “Convention of the States” has never been invoked before, but Republicans and Koch-backed organizations like Citizens for Self-Governance have been salivating over the possibility for years, even holding dress rehearsals in Washington, D.C., with representatives from across the country. With the federal deficit presently hovering just below \$20 trillion, their ostensible plan is to add a balanced budget amendment. This alone would likely shred the country’s meager social safety net, but as Assembly Minority Leader and Kenosha Democrat Peter Barca warns the Wisconsin State Journal, a constitutional convention could put citizens’ very rights “up for grabs.”

Scot Ross, executive director of liberal advocacy group One Wisconsin Now, puts it more bluntly: “The balanced budget talk is a fig leaf to let them change America into a right-wing alternative universe.”

In April of this year, the Left went to war against a constitutional convention as 230 left-wing groups, led by Common Cause, signed a letter warning of the supposed dangers posed by a convention of the states (“More Than 200 Organizations Oppose Calls for New Constitutional Convention, Warn of Dangers,” April 14, 2017).

“A constitutional convention call, even on a single issue will become a Pandora’s box—once it’s open there will be no controlling where it goes, putting every Americans’ basic rights on the auction block,” said Karen Hobert Flynn, president of Common Cause. “The wealthy special interest who are funding this push do not share the best interest of the American people, and there are no rules to limit their influence on what could be brought up once a convention is convened.”

If Ms. Flynn and Common Cause are concerned about “wealthy special interests” who don’t share the best interests of the American people, they may want to reconsider the co-signers of their letter (or ponder the irony of their own group’s motto: “Holding Power Accountable”). The groups joining Common Cause in opposition to the convention include the nation’s most powerful labor unions, which are special interests that use their wealth to swamp the lists of the largest political donors in America, including the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and the AFL-CIO, as well as unions that represent government employees who live off of their fellow citizens’ tax dollars: the National Education Association; the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees; and their friends at AFSCME Retirees.

Then there are the letter’s co-signers who are pillars of the political crusade to eliminate the constitutional distinction between U.S. citizens and aliens: Dream Defenders, Mi Familia Vota, and National Council of La Raza Action Fund. And the co-signers whose very names indicate that their highest priority is protecting their government entitlements at all costs: Center for Medicare Advocacy, National WIC Association, and Social Security Works. And the co-signers who exist to press for more federal funding under all circumstances, whether or not the Constitution grants the federal government authority to meddle in the area, including the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities and the Children’s Defense Fund. And the co-signers who are all-purpose left-wing pressure groups, including Daily Kos, Center for American Progress, and ProgressNow. And the co-signer People for the American Way, whose vicious campaign against the Supreme Court nomination of Judge Robert Bork gave rise to the term “borking,” which may be defined as “smearing judicial

nominees who respect the Constitution and the role of judges it prescribes.”

And yet, despite all this evidence that the groups involved have little respect for the constitutional order our Founders established, the press release announcing the left-wing coalition against the Convention of States quotes Robert Greenstein, president of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, warning that “The implications of a Constitutional Convention are staggering. Our country faces enough problems and division. We don’t need to add to them and inflame an already toxic political environment by placing at risk the constitutional structure that has served us well for more than two centuries—and heading into dangerous, unknown territory by calling a convention to rework the Constitution. Leading legal scholars from across the political spectrum agree that once convened, the scope of the convention in seeking to rewrite the Constitution could not be limited.”

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*“Borking” may be defined as “smearing judicial nominees who respect the Constitution and the role of judges it prescribes.”*

This fear of a “runaway convention” is often raised by skeptics, but it seems misplaced. Justice Antonin Scalia, as noted above, didn’t seem too concerned about it.

Former constitutional law professor Rob Natelson, who runs the Article V Information Center at the Denver-based Independence Institute writes that the “runaway scenario” has “almost no basis in history or law,” even though “it has long frightened Americans away from using the Constitution’s chief mechanism for bypassing Congress and curing our dysfunctional federal government.”

In the 1960s and 1970s, “leading establishment liberals, such as [President John F.] Kennedy speechwriter Theodore Sorensen and Kennedy confidant Arthur Goldberg, capitalized on that confusion by raising the runaway specter.” Their plan was “to scare people away from using the Constitution’s convention mechanism,” in order to “protect from reversal by constitutional amendment several Supreme Court decisions that had proved highly controversial—among them *Roe v. Wade*, the case that legalized abortion nationwide. Second, they sought to block growing momentum for amendments imposing term limits and requiring a federal balanced budget.”

Natelson continued:

An n-gram search in Google Books to find out when the phrase “runaway convention” arose...[showed] the term was almost unknown until around 1960—when it suddenly became extraordinarily common. Usage rose to counter rising popular demand for constitutional amendments. In the 1990s, as momentum for amendments abated, so also did resort to the runaway scenario. Another n-gram search shows that the abbreviation “con con,” widely used by convention opponents, also was invented around 1960.

Robert Biggerstaff, a colleague of Natelson, notes, “In the 1950s and 60s progressives actively sought change through courts when it was not possible through legislatures. This was an express tactical choice to seek through judicial activism what was stymied by legislatures” (“How progressives promoted the ‘runaway convention’ myth to save judicial activism,” *The Hill*, May 7, 2017).

The Convention of States Project conducted a “historic simulation” at Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia, on Sept. 21-23, 2016, that failed to turn into a runaway convention. It was attended by 137 delegates representing 32 states across the nation.

The Convention passed six proposed amendments:

1. Forbid the public debt to be increased except upon a recorded vote of two-thirds of each house of Congress
2. Set term limits on Members of Congress
3. Limit federal overreach by returning the Commerce Clause to its original meaning
4. Limit the power of federal regulations by giving Congress an easy override
5. Require a super majority to raise federal taxes and repeal the 16th Amendment (which permits a federal income tax)
6. Give the states (by a three-fifths vote) the power to abrogate any federal law, regulation, or executive order.

“The events at Williamsburg will be remembered as a turning point in history,” said COS co-founder Michael Farris. “The spirit of liberty and self-government has been reignited.”

*continued on page 23*



# “ONLY A COALITION OF ISLAMISTS AND MARXISTS CAN DESTROY THE UNITED STATES.”

—Ilyich Ramírez Sánchez, AKA Carlos the Jackal

*Soviet Islam* is the second episode in the five-part *America Under Siege* webseries the Capital Research Center will release over the course of 2017. Each episode investigates the growing influence of revolutionary Marxists and their allies in different sectors of American society.

When the Soviet Union failed to eradicate religion, it changed tactics. After World War II, Soviet communists forged alliances with unlikely partners—radical Islamists and Middle Eastern nationalist dictators. Beginning in the Cold War and continuing through until today, the Kremlin has armed, trained, and supported these Islamists and dictators to progress toward a frightening goal: subverting their shared American enemy.

Those radicals became a domestic threat in the 1960s. Religious extremists like the Nation of Islam coopted Soviet ideology to agitate American institutions and disrupt democracy. For the Soviets, the intent was to make the United States ungovernable through organized protest and violence. But while the Cold War may be over, the threat from the Kremlin is more serious now than ever.

Today, Russian President Vladimir Putin is the heir to the Soviet strategy of subversion. Picking up where the old KGB left off, his regime continues to leverage the vast network of radicals across the Middle East and the West that the Soviets created.

Our film was written by and stars conservative author Trevor Loudon, was directed by Judd Saul, and was produced by Cohesion Films in partnership with Dangerous Documentaries (a project of CRC).

Trevor's research into Soviet and modern Russian influence on radical Islamism and Middle Eastern dictatorships is especially urgent, given the current conflict in Syria. It shows that many influential political actors in America have ideological roots in the Soviet Union's past meddling in Islamic society is unsettling—which helps to explain Russia's latest tactic to subvert her enemies from within.

*America Under Siege: Soviet Islam* is available to watch for free on [DangerousDocumentaries.com](http://DangerousDocumentaries.com).

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The Convention of States Project offers the following examples of amendment topics that could be discussed at a convention of states:

- A balanced budget amendment
- A redefinition of the General Welfare Clause (the original view was the federal government could not spend money on any topic within the jurisdiction of the states)
- A redefinition of the Commerce Clause (the original view was that Congress was granted a narrow and exclusive power to regulate shipments across state lines—not all the economic activity of the nation)
- A prohibition of using international treaties and law to govern the domestic law of the United States
- A limitation on using Executive Orders and federal regulations to enact laws (since Congress is supposed to be the exclusive agency to enact laws)
- Imposing term limits on Congress and the Supreme Court
- Placing an upper limit on federal taxation
- Requiring the sunset of all existing federal taxes and a super-majority vote to replace them with new, fairer taxes

Of course, these are merely examples of what would be up for discussion. The convention of states itself would determine which ideas deserve serious consideration, and it will take a majority of votes from the states to formally propose any amendments.

## THE MOVEMENT IS SURGING

A frequent complaint by conservatives is that conservative movements are not well-organized. This criticism does not apply to the Convention of States Project. It is currently organized and active in all 50 states and claims to have more than 2 million volunteers, supporters, and advocates determined to bring the federal government's abuse of power to an end. According to COS,

the grassroots is the key to calling a successful convention. The goal is to build a political operation in a minimum of 40 states, getting 100 people to volunteer in at least 75 percent of the state's legislative districts. We believe this is very doable. But only through the support of the American people will this project have a chance to succeed.



*Article V contains a long-ignored provision that requires Congress to call a constitutional convention when the legislatures of two-thirds of the states demand it, something that has never happened.*

The nationwide COS movement enjoys the support of a high-profile ally: straight-shooting former Sen. Tom Coburn (R-Okla.), who serves as a senior adviser to the Convention of States Project. Coburn argues for a convention of the states in his new book, *Smashing the DC Monopoly: Using Article V to Restore Freedom and Stop America's Runaway Government*.

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*The Convention of States Project has more than 2 million volunteers, supporters, and advocates determined to bring the federal government's abuse of power to an end.*

Groups listed on the COS website as endorsers are the Association of Mature American Citizens, U.S. Term Limits, and the Texas Public Policy Foundation.

Among the individuals listed are Texas Gov. Greg Abbott (R); former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee (R); former Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin (R); former Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal (R); Sens. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) and Ron Johnson

Credit: Convention of States Project; YouTube screenshot.  
License: <https://go.gl/XLmSY9>.



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*The possibility of a second civil war in the U.S. is not hyperbole.*

(R-Wisc.); former Congressman Lt. Col. (Ret.) Allen West (R-Fla.); Fox News terrorism analyst Lt. Col. Bill Cowan, USMC (Ret.); and broadcaster Sean Hannity.

## CONCLUSION

So what's next? "If we don't fix this, civil war is the trajectory," according to Meckler. Things have gone too far. "We have nationalized so many decisions."

The possibility of a second civil war in the U.S. is not hyperbole. The frightening violence the Left unleashed on society during the Obama era—Occupy Wall Street and Black Lives Matter—and during Donald Trump's campaign, then the transition period, and now during his presidency, is just a taste of what these Saul Alinsky-inspired activists have in store for us.

"The question that is facing America today is simply, who decides?" Meckler says.

America, you have a choice to make. ■

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



## UNIONS AND THEIR “WORKER CENTERS” BEHIND A \$15 AN HOUR MINIMUM WAGE

Shedding jobs for unskilled workers in the name of helping the poor  
By Carl F. Horowitz

**Summary:** *It began on the fringes of union activism. In just a few years, the campaign for a \$15 an hour federal minimum wage—armed with the slogan “Fight for \$15!”—has gone mainstream. And should this union-driven movement succeed, the result could be a lot of frustrated job seekers and shuttered businesses.*

By the end of last year, about 30 state and local jurisdictions had enacted laws phasing in a \$15 an hour minimum wage either for all employees public and private, or just for those in the public sector. These jurisdictions include the states of New York and California, the cities of Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, Milwaukee, Pittsburgh, Syracuse, Washington, D.C., and Greensboro, NC; smaller municipalities such as Emeryville and Mountain View, CA, Milwaukie, OR, Missoula, MT, San Marcos, TX, and SeaTac, WA; and various counties, including Los Angeles County. For good measure, the University of California System and University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, among other institutions of higher education, have also decided to phase in a \$15 an hour minimum wage.

### APPEALING TO THE BASE

Fight for \$15 supporters are, if nothing else, vocal about their displeasure over the current federal minimum wage of \$7.25 an hour, established in 2009.

No one is more vehement on this topic than Sen. Bernie Sanders of Vermont, who became a national figure in the 2016 presidential elections. Back in July 2015, Sen. Sanders introduced a bill, the “Pay Workers a Living Wage Act” (S.1832), that would phase in a \$15 an hour minimum wage for all Americans. “It is a national disgrace that millions of full-time workers are living in poverty and millions more are forced to work two or three jobs just to pay their bills,” he bellowed in characteristic style to an audience outside the U.S. Capitol. “In the year 2015, a job must lift workers out of poverty, not keep them in it. The



*Fight for \$15 supporters are, if nothing else, vocal about their displeasure over the current federal minimum wage of \$7.25 an hour established in 2009.*

current federal minimum of \$7.25 an hour is a starvation wage and must be raised to a living wage.” Several House members, including Keith Ellison (D-Minn.), Raul Grijalva (D-Ariz.), and Sheila Jackson Lee (D-Tex.), introduced companion legislation.

These lawmakers are in good company. Then-President Barack Obama offered this praise late last June on behalf of the Washington, D.C., local government’s passage of a \$15 an hour minimum wage bill: “I commend the District of Columbia, Mayor Muriel Bowser and the Council of the District of Columbia for raising the District’s minimum wage,” he said.

Then, Obama’s second-term labor secretary, Thomas Perez, declared: “The Fight for \$15 is more than a number. This is a movement for fairness and voice.” And, during the fraught

*Carl F. Horowitz heads the Organized Labor Accountability Project for the National Legal and Policy Center in Falls Church, Virginia.*

Credit: SEIU Local 99, License: <https://goo.gl/CUqf1L>.

presidential primary campaign, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who had previously expressed support for a \$12 an hour minimum, changed her tune during a New York State primary debate with her main rival, Senator Sanders: She would readily sign \$15 an hour legislation, she insisted. “Of course, I would,” she said. In her convention acceptance speech in Philadelphia she explained: “If you believe the minimum wage should be a living wage—and no one working full time should have to raise their children in poverty—join us.”

Much of the general public has gotten on the Fight for \$15 bandwagon. According to a 2015 survey by the National Employment Law Project, about 60 percent of respondents support a \$15 an hour minimum wage. During late-February and early-March of that year, a *Washington Post*/ABC News poll asked how congressional candidate’s support for a higher minimum wage would affect voter support. Fully 50 percent of respondents said they would be more likely to vote for someone who supported a higher minimum wage; 19 percent said they would be less likely; and 28 percent said they would not be persuaded to change their mind.

## UNIONS TAKE CHARGE

Following the statement of support by Labor Secretary Perez, Service Employees International Union (SEIU) President Mary Kay Henry rhapsodized: “The idea that the labor secretary thinks their fight is moral and just is a huge affirmation to [both movement leaders and low-wage workers].”

The drive for a \$15 an hour minimum wage, first and foremost, is a project of organized labor. Unions or union surrogates—“worker center” political action organizations—have played a key role in every campaign so far.

The AFL-CIO, whose 56 member unions represent over 12.5 million workers, has been pressuring Congress to pass \$15 an hour legislation—but the federation website actually considers \$15 an hour on the low side, citing the heart-stopping figure of \$18.67 an hour as a fair minimum wage, taking into account productivity gains in the economy since 1968.

Unions have been active at the state and local levels as well. In New Jersey, the head of the state AFL-CIO chapter testified on behalf of a bill in the state Senate Labor Committee last year that would phase in a \$15 an hour minimum by 2021, roughly an 80 percent increase over the current \$8.38 an hour; the General Assembly and Senate



Credit: Marc Norell. License: <https://goo.gl/4nuU1F>.

*“It is a national disgrace that millions of full-time workers are living in poverty and millions more are forced to work two or three jobs just to pay their bills.” —Sen. Bernie Sanders*

each passed this measure, but Republican Governor Chris Christie vetoed it in August. Raise Up Cleveland, an ad hoc group representing dozens of unions with roughly 100,000 workers in the Cleveland metro area, passed a resolution last June to pressure the City of Cleveland to raise the minimum wage to \$15 an hour. “The fight for \$15 movement is happening on the streets and on picket lines, and it is happening in Congress, statehouses and city halls,” announced Raise Up Cleveland Executive Secretary Harriet Applegate.

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*The AFL-CIO considers \$15 an hour on the low side, citing the heart-stopping figure of \$18.67 an hour as a fair minimum wage.*

It is through the so-called worker centers that unions have had their greatest impact. These organizations, not officially unions, nevertheless perform the organizing and picketing functions of unions without having to comply with applicable National Labor Relations Act statutes. Not only do unions cooperate with these worker centers, they use them as fronts and often create them for that purpose. There is a mutual advantage in this. Worker centers become expert at organizing entry-level workers; unions obtain potential





*As the years passed and Washington minimum wages increased to well over the federal levels, the profits have disappeared. Next to disappear will be the child care centers and their employees, who will all be out of work.*

boosts in membership, dues, and bargaining power, especially in fast food, home care, maintenance, and other service industries with high concentrations of entry-level immigrant employees of limited English-speaking ability.

It's not surprising that a New York City-based worker center, Fast Food Forward, a creation of SEIU, kicked the Fight for \$15 movement into high gear. On August 29, 2013, Fast Food Forward activists in several cities led employee walkouts and rallies. Such activism makes perfect sense; the group is all but identical to New York Communities for Change, the reconstituted New York City chapter of the disbanded Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN). Meanwhile, the "HERE" (Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees) portion of UNITE HERE for several years has sponsored a worker center called Restaurant Opportunities Centers United. This group lobbies lawmakers in various states to raise the minimum wage to \$15 an hour, and also helps federal and state agencies enforce minimum wage laws, files lawsuits against employers, and publishes an annual "ethical eating" guide. The United Food and Commercial Workers has its own worker center stalking-horse, OUR Walmart, which has been the driving force behind some highly-publicized strikes, pickets, and customer disruptions at selected Walmart stores.

## REPERCUSSIONS AND CONSEQUENCES

Supporters of more than doubling the national minimum wage can't be faulted for their enthusiasm. They can, however, be faulted for their unwillingness to consider the impact of what they are supporting. For if a \$15 an hour

minimum becomes law throughout the land, the most likely enduring legacy will be more entry-level unemployment and closed businesses, especially small businesses. "There is no question that a \$15 minimum wage would have devastating impacts on small businesses," notes Tom Scott, head of the California affiliate of the National Federation of Independent Business.

We do not have to imagine such a future; it's already here. Shortly after the City of Los Angeles raised its minimum wage in 2015 to \$15 an hour, American Apparel eliminated 500 jobs in the city and announced plans to relocate those jobs elsewhere in the state. In June 2016, following the passage of the California law, the company began examining the possibility of moving production facilities outside the state altogether. California Composites, a commercial airplane parts manufacturer based in Santa Fe Springs (Los Angeles County), has revealed plans to move operations to Fort Worth, Texas. Company President Fred Donnelly said he sees no other way out. "This is the last thing I want to do, but I don't see that I have a choice," he said, citing the statewide minimum wage hike, excessive regulation, and a "dysfunctional" worker's compensation system. Other California firms are likewise heading for the exit door, he said. "I've talked to some of our suppliers and other people in the business—in particular, owners that are in small manufacturing—and they're thinking about it."

But evidence for the harmful effects of the \$15 an hour minimum wage goes beyond anecdotes, beyond human interest stories. That's clear from an examination of the impact of "living wage" laws, similar to the \$15 an hour minimum wage. With a "living wage" law, the stated goal is to mandate a minimum wage at a level that is deemed necessary to cover all basic household expenses, a level that is indexed to inflation.

In 1999, the Washington, D.C.-based Employment Policies Institute published a study by economists George Tolley (University of Chicago), Peter Bernstein (DePaul University), and Michael Lesage (RCF Economic & Financial Consulting) on the effects of a proposed (and eventually passed) "living wage" measure that was before the Chicago City Council in 1996. The proposal called for a 79 percent hike in the minimum wage for employees of city contractors that receive municipal tax breaks. The ordinance, concluded the authors, would cost the city nearly \$20 million a year, with more than 20 percent of this sum to be spent on enforcement costs. They projected that it would result in at least 1,300 lost jobs.

Meanwhile, David Neumark, now with the University of California-Irvine, in 2002 published a monograph for the

San Francisco-based Public Policy Institute of California, *How Living Wage Laws Affect Low-Wage Workers and Low-Wage Families*. The author, having surveyed living wage laws in cities across the country, concluded that while wages of low-income workers rise, overall employment among low-skilled workers falls. “These disemployment effects,” Neumark wrote, “counter the positive effect of living wage laws on the wages of low-wage workers, pointing to the tradeoff between wages and employment that economic theory would predict.” He also found that these ordinances tended to reduce the incentives for cities to contract with private entities, thus warming the hearts of public-sector unions.

Even a hike to \$10.10 an hour, something President Obama mandated for federal contractors in a 2014 executive order, is likely to lead to unemployment. At the time of the executive order, the Congressional Budget Office published a report on the impact of raising the minimum wage, respectively, to \$9.00 an hour and \$10.10 an hour for the entire U.S. labor force. At \$9.00 an hour, the CBO calculated, there would be a net job loss of 100,000 jobs. At \$10.10 an hour, the net loss would be 500,000 jobs. Using the CBO methodology, William Even (Miami University of Ohio) and David Macpherson (Trinity University of San Antonio), in a separate study, concluded that a \$12 an hour national minimum wage would lead to the loss of 770,000 jobs.

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*Even a hike to \$10.10 an hour, something President Obama mandated for federal contractors in a 2014 executive order, is likely to lead to unemployment.*

A reasonable extrapolation suggests that with minimum wages fixed at \$15 an hour, the net job loss could run into the millions. Last July, in fact, the Heritage Foundation published a paper projecting precisely that. If Congress were to enact the Bernie Sanders’ \$15 an hour minimum wage bill and put it into play in 2017, Heritage labor policy analyst James Sherk concluded, nearly seven million full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs would be lost over the next four years. Working with a Current Population Survey/National Bureau of Economic Research data base, he noted:

If Congress raised starting wages to \$15, employers would reduce employment of affected workers by approximately 19 percent. That represents about 6.9



*A left-leaning Washington, D.C.-based think tank, the Economic Policy Institute, advances the idea that a living wage would lift millions of working Americans out of poverty and would relieve the need for cash welfare, food stamps, Medicaid, and other forms of public assistance.*

million fewer FTE jobs in the U.S. by 2021. These jobs losses come on top of jobs lost by state-level minimum-wage increases. The Pay Workers a Living Wage Act would prevent seven million workers from getting paid anything.

In his analysis, the author said that employers on average would have to hike affected workers’ wages by 27.4 percent, and more likely than not, would have to offer additional compensation to workers who make just above the newly-created minimum. He also took into account the fact that employer expenses include FICA payroll taxes (i.e., Social Security and Medicare Part A), unemployment taxes, workers’ compensation contributions, and a wide range of benefits. In the case of healthcare benefits, employers with 50 or more employees who decline to sponsor a plan would be forced under the Affordable Care Act to pay a per-employee penalty out of after-tax revenues. The 2016 healthcare figure of \$2,160 per worker is set to rise to \$2,886 by 2021. From the employer’s standpoint, *Sanders’ proposed minimum wage would work out to \$18.61 an hour.*

## AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION?

Employment impacts aside, “living wage” enthusiasts justify a hike to \$15 an hour as fiscal prudence. By forcing employers to pay a living wage, they argue, millions of working Americans would be lifted out of poverty and hence would be relieved of the need for cash welfare, food stamps, Medicaid, and other forms of public assistance.

Credit: Center for American Progress.  
License: <https://goo.gl/xBLKoo>.

Taxpayers in turn would realize huge savings.

A left-leaning Washington, D.C.-based think tank, the Economic Policy Institute, has been prominent in advancing this “ounce of prevention” rationale. In a recent report, EPI concluded, “Raising the minimum wage to \$10.10 would reduce government expenditures on current income-support programs by \$7.6 billion per year—and possibly more, given the conservative nature of this estimate.” Sen. Sanders cited this statistic in a tweet he sent to followers last May 4 following his victory in the Indiana Democratic primary. EPI researchers subsequently ran their model for a \$12 an hour minimum wage, concluding that an annual \$17 billion savings would result.

Yet when it comes to a \$15 an hour minimum wage, EPI appears to be hedging its bets. Lead investigator David Cooper puts it this way: “I don’t think we know definitively whether \$15 would be different because it is larger than the increases that have been rigorously studied. If you think \$15 would have some sizable negative effect on employment or hours, it’s going to moderate those savings (on government assistance programs). We have no way to know how much.” That doesn’t exactly sound like a ringing endorsement.

The larger issue here is that a taxpayer windfall of any size is highly unlikely: No previous hike has produced a reduction in public benefits expenditures, and it is hard to imagine any will. Anyone with a grasp of political reality knows that the people demanding a \$15 an hour minimum wage are the very sorts of people who for decades have been demanding, and receiving, public benefits. They are not likely to quiet down because the federal minimum wage has been doubled. Equally to the point, hiking the minimum wage by this magnitude will discourage entry-level employment either via job elimination or schedule reduction. The outcome, if anything, would be an increase in the demand for public assistance.

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*Using Population Survey data, Neumark and Wascher concluded that a minimum wage hike redistributes incomes of the poor more than it raises them.*

A number of economists have expressed this concern. Tara Sinclair, an economist at George Washington University, puts it this way: “A larger hike is more likely to cause a decrease in employment opportunities, and that could



Credit: Facesof15.com. License: <https://goo.gl/NrmzJ1>.

*In August, Z Pizza is shutting down and putting 11 workers out of work in Seattle. Ritu Shah Burnham doesn’t want to go out of business, but says she can’t afford the city’s mandated wage hikes.*

result in an increase in the demand for government support rather than a decrease.” Texas A&M economist Jonathan Meer likewise is skeptical. “These estimates are predicated on the notion that the minimum wage is a simple transfer from employers to employees, with no negative effects on employment,” he said. “The higher the minimum wage goes, the worse of an assumption that is.”

## WOULD THE POOR BENEFIT?

A cursory examination of the issue might indicate advocates of a \$15 an hour minimum wage are on solid ground when they argue that it will eliminate poverty. Whatever net job losses occur, they argue, would be more than offset by the elimination of poverty among previously underpaid workers. Empirical research, however, does not support such an assertion.

In a 2007 peer-reviewed article, economists Richard Burkhauser (Cornell) and Joseph Sabia (San Diego State University), after examining Census data for 1979-2003, concluded that minimum wage increases produced no significant reductions in poverty. The authors did a follow-up study on the consequences of instituting a \$9.50 an hour federal minimum wage. Once again, they found at best a weak association between higher wages and lower poverty rates. In a separate study, Sabia and University of Georgia economist Robert Nielsen used an alternate data base for measuring poverty, the Survey of Income and Program Participation, once more finding no evidence that raising the minimum wage will eliminate poverty. In yet another study, the aforementioned David Neumark and William Wascher (Federal Reserve Board), using Current



Population Survey data, concluded that a minimum wage hike redistributes incomes of the poor more than it raises them. The net movement out of poverty was minimal, they explained, because of employee layoffs and schedule reductions, among other factors.

## WHAT'S NEW IN SEATTLE?

Enthusiasts for a \$15 an hour minimum wage respond to such studies by noting that they are projections and thus do not evaluate actual results. Though available evidence regarding the beneficial effects of the \$15 an hour minimum wage at this stage is obviously minimal, supporters insist it is encouraging.

Really?

The case of Seattle, whose city council in June 2014 enacted a \$15 an hour minimum, has been of special interest. Jacob Vigdor, a professor of public policy at the University of Washington, has studied the evidence and sees no real problem. “The sky is not falling,” he said last year. “If it was [sic] really bad, a lot of people would have lost their jobs and every opening would get tons of applicants. That is not happening.” Vigdor and fellow researchers, analyzing state employment data at a time when the local minimum wage stood at \$11 an hour (compared to \$9.32 an hour for the rest of Washington State) found that a higher wage did not have a significant effect on unemployment rates, scheduled employee hours or business failures. Local retail and gasoline prices also were unaffected.

Such a conclusion appears hasty. For one thing, the \$15 per hour rate has yet to take full effect across the workforce, even for large businesses (defined as employing no less than 500) which are supposed to adopt the wage hike first. Smaller businesses have an additional four-year reprieve before full implementation. Preliminary evidence suggests a rough ride ahead, especially for restaurants. *Seattle* magazine explained the situation in March 2015, less than a year following passage of the \$15 per hour minimum wage law:

Since the legislation was announced last summer, *The Seattle Times* and *Eater* have reported extensively on restaurant owners’ many concerns about how to compensate for the extra funds that will now be required for labor: They may need to raise menu prices, source poorer ingredients, reduce operating hours, reduce their labor and/or more.

The Washington Restaurant Association’s Anthony Anton put it this way: “It’s not a political problem; it’s a math problem.”



Credit: Ficusof15.com. License: <https://goo.gl/qvSLgK>.

*Spokane pub owner Tim O'Dorherty said the minimum wage increase from \$9.47 to \$11 put their labor costs over the edge, and they decided to close.*

A Seattle-based think tank, the Washington Policy Center, offered a similar prognosis in a blog published later that month:

As the implementation date for Seattle's strict \$15 per hour minimum wage law approaches, the city is experiencing a rising trend in restaurant closures. The tough new law goes into effect April 1st. The closings have occurred across the city, from Grub in the upscale Queen Anne neighborhood, to Little Uncle in gritty Pioneer Square, to the Boat Street Café on Western Avenue near the waterfront.

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*Seattle small businesses won't have to pay the \$15 an hour an hour minimum wage until 2021; given the job losses occurring already, things don't look too promising.*

The shut-downs have idled dozens of low-wage workers, the very people advocates say the wage law is supposed to help. Instead of delivering the promised “living wage” of \$15 an hour, economic realities created by the law have dropped the hourly wage for these workers to zero.

Advocates of a high minimum wage said businesses would simply pay the mandated wage out of profits, raising earnings for workers. Restaurants operate on thin margins, though, with average profits of 4 percent or less, and the business is highly competitive.



*The owner of a beloved cafe and bakery says the costs to operate in Seattle contributed to the sudden shuttering of its doors. “I don’t want to put this all on the minimum wage, but it was definitely a factor...”*

Seattle small businesses won’t have to pay the \$15 an hour minimum wage until 2021; given the job losses occurring already, things don’t look too promising. But defenders of the Seattle law aren’t about to give up. A letter to *Forbes* magazine, published in March 2016, is typical of the rosy assessments of some: “Between January and December 2014, while SeaTac’s business owners (and their customers) were absorbing the cost of paying minimum wage employees \$15 an hour,” the letter asserted, “unemployment decreased 17.46 percent, falling from 6.3 percent to 5.2 percent. It turns out that you CAN increase the minimum wage (even in large increments) and increase overall employment at the same time.”

The author of this letter seems to have a problem with the concept of cause and effect. There are, in fact, any number of explanations for Seattle’s healthy economy that have absolutely nothing to do with a minimum wage hike. For one thing, the Seattle employment situation, like anywhere else, is a reflection of regional and national employment job trends, which at present are far from ominous. For another, Seattle has an educated, mobile and well-paid work force, many of whom make well in excess of \$15 an hour or its salary equivalent. Some of the nation’s largest, innovative and profitable companies—Amazon, Boeing, Microsoft—are either based in the Seattle area or have a major presence there.

## SKEPTICISM WITHIN THE ECONOMICS PROFESSION

In advancing a \$15 an hour minimum wage, unions and their political allies claim that only “right-wingers,” often funded by shadowy financiers such as the Koch brothers, oppose the idea. In fact, many economists, including those with a sterling reputation for liberalism, are highly skeptical.

The Brookings Institution’s Gary Burtless, for example, admitted: “It’s very hard to believe that a minimum wage hike to \$15 would produce the same adverse impact on employment as a hike to just \$10.10.” That adverse impact would likely be higher at \$15, he suggested. Harry Holzer, chief economist for the Department of Labor under President Clinton and currently, like Burtless, affiliated with Brookings, noted that “such increases are extremely risky. In job markets where young or less-educated workers already have difficulty finding jobs and gaining important work experience, such mandates will likely make it much harder.”

And Princeton’s Alan Krueger, who during November 2011–August 2013 chaired President Obama’s Council of Economic Advisers, also has choice words: “A \$15 per hour national minimum wage would put us in uncharted waters, and risk undesirable and unintended consequences....[T]he push for a nationwide \$15 national minimum wage strikes me as a risk not worth taking.”

“*There are any number of explanations for Seattle’s healthy economy that have absolutely nothing to do with a minimum wage hike.*”

Such apprehensions are widespread in the economics profession. In the fall of 2015, researchers at the University of New Hampshire conducted a nationwide survey on behalf of the Employment Policies Institute: They asked economists their opinions regarding the \$15 an hour minimum wage: of the survey’s 166 respondents, 83 percent and 52 percent, respectively, believed the wage hike would adversely affect youth and adult employment. Fully 76 percent believed it would diminish the number of available jobs. And 67 percent said it would make it harder for small businesses to operate.

As evidence of support among economists, backers of the \$15 an hour minimum wage point to a strongly-worded online petition with 208 signatures. Upon close inspection, this manifesto is a lot less impressive than it looks at first glance. First-tier economics departments at major universities are largely unrepresented; the roster is heavily weighted toward a handful of institutions. Fully 23 of the signers were affiliated with the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, five with the University of Massachusetts-Boston, and six with the University of Missouri-Kansas City. That lack of academic diversity suggests that peer pressure played a role in the gathering of signatures.

## A DISHONEST CAMPAIGN

Only a few years ago, a \$15 an hour minimum wage was not a mainstream idea. Now, it has captured the imaginations of many well-meaning people—who doesn't want low wage workers to earn more, to better themselves, to live a more comfortable life? As more and more cities, counties, and states adopt it, pressure for corresponding federal legislation will increase. There is no rational basis for this campaign; the \$15 an hour figure was invented out of thin air, without serious consideration of the pros and cons of higher or lower numbers, and the idea was spread through an expensive public relations campaign by the Service Employees International Union.

A leading SEIU organizer, Kendall Fells, disclosed during a panel discussion in December 2015 how his union arrived at the number. "I would say it was a pretty scientific process," he offered. "\$10 was too low and \$20 was too high, so we landed at \$15."

Ironically, unions supporting the \$15 an hour minimum don't necessarily practice what they preach. For example, an AFL-CIO front group, Working America, not long ago advertised job openings for field organizers beginning at \$12.25 an hour.

Supporters of more than doubling the current federal minimum wage typically invoke lofty rhetoric about justice, decency, and fairness. In pursuing their mission, they rarely consider that good intentions can lead to counterproductive outcomes. When criticized, they often respond by projecting nefarious motives onto their critics.

In reality, opponents of a radical hike in the minimum wage are not saying that workers should be paid less than what they are worth. They're trying to preserve jobs for entry-level and other unskilled workers. They're pointing out that, if the government sets a minimum wage higher than the value of an employee's labor, it destroys jobs. They're pointing out that \$15 an hour—which costs employers almost \$19 an hour when taxes and mandated benefits are added in—would remove that first critical rung on the jobs ladder, making it ever harder for many Americans to lift themselves out of poverty.

Unfortunately, labor unions and allied political operatives prefer going the route of government mandate to achieve their ends. The unintended consequence of such a mandate will be fewer jobs for entry-level workers and, for many employers, an increased risk of going out of business altogether. ■

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*Read previous articles from the Labor Watch series online at [www.CapitalResearch.org/category/labor-watch/](http://www.CapitalResearch.org/category/labor-watch/).*



# ORGANIZATION TRENDS



## CENTER FOR MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY

The radical Left's agenda-driven "watchdog"

By Michael Watson

**Summary:** *Born from the fever swamps of the Bush-era anti-war Left, the Center for Media and Democracy spreads conspiratorial propaganda about conservative donors and organizations. But this organization's record is long on hypocrisy and special-interest politics and short on the truth.*

The Center for Media and Democracy (CMD), based in Wisconsin, is a left-wing media, opposition research, and agitation group. Headquartered in Madison, the group runs websites that provide opposition research against conservative public policy nonprofits; it also files open-records requests harassing conservative state policymakers.

## OVERVIEW

CMD has its origins in the anti-corporate and conspiratorial career of its founder John Stauber and his co-author Sheldon Rampton. The organization served as the launching pad for Stauber and Rampton to write books alleging that the Bush Administration sought to turn the country into a right-wing one-party state and that mad cow disease would become a substantial public health crisis.

In recent years, CMD has shifted its emphasis from anti-war movement publishing and mad cow-related horror stories to leading efforts to restrict business speech and free-market groups' public influence. CMD operates the websites PR Watch and SourceWatch—both of which serve as repositories for opposition research targeting business-aligned conservative groups, including the Capital Research Center. Since 2011, CMD has orchestrated a series of attack campaigns denouncing free-market, state-level policy organizations like the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) and the State Policy Network (SPN).

The Tides Foundation and the network of groups associated with progressive billionaire George Soros have provided funding for CMD since the year 2000. Following the 2010 Wisconsin state elections, which saw the state's governorship



*CMD runs websites that serve as opposition research stores against conservative public policy nonprofits and files open records requests harassing conservative state policymakers.*

and legislature switch from Democratic to Republican control, Center for Media and Democracy changed its stated policy and began receiving contributions from labor unions. In recent years, the organization has received contributions from the AFL-CIO, Service Employees International Union (SEIU), the National Education Association (NEA), the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT).

As Center for Media and Democracy's profile has risen in recent years, the group has faced substantial criticism for its hypocritical policies regarding donor disclosure. While CMD lists a carefully screened selection of its funding foundations, the group also takes substantial money from anonymous contributors through donor-advised funds—the very practice decried in other contexts by CMD as “dark money.” In fact, in 2011, CMD received over 60 percent of its revenue from a single donor-advised fund, the Schwab Charitable Fund.

## CMD'S RADICAL HISTORY

The Center for Media and Democracy grew out of the far-left environmentalist and anti-capitalist movements

*Michael Watson is a research analyst at Capital Research Center.*

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launched by Jeremy Rifkin and the Foundation on Economic Trends, where John Stauber worked before founding CMD. With his co-author, Sheldon Rampton, Stauber used his new nonprofit to publish a series of books attacking businesses and the public relations industry.

Stauber is an old-line radical who began his political involvement in the anti-Vietnam War movement of the 1960s; he carried this opposition to American military involvements over to CMD. In the early 1990s, Stauber and Rampton penned the screed *Toxic Sludge Is Good for You*, in which they characterize the First Gulf War—supported by over three dozen nations in response to despot Saddam Hussein’s illegal annexation of Kuwait—as a “crass grab to save cheap oil.” Indeed, Stauber and Rampton’s reliably radical positions led the left-wing New York City alt-weekly *The Village Voice* to comment, “...these guys come from the far side of liberal.”

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*CMD takes substantial money from anonymous contributors through donor-advised funds, decried by CMD as “dark money.”*

Stauber’s CMD launched the PR Watch newsletter and SourceWatch.org, a wiki-style website that provides opposition research on its targets; both products attack conservatives as tools of business interests. These websites spread fuzzy opposition research claiming that conservative groups spout the agendas of unfashionable industries like tobacco, coal, and agriculture.

Somehow, by 2009, CMD—in spite of its certifiably radical history—was seen as “respectable” by liberals and Democrats. The group appointed Lisa Graves, a former staffer to Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-VT) and senior legislative strategist for the American Civil Liberties Union, to replace Stauber as executive director. A year later, the Graves-run CMD made a major change in the organization’s stated funding policy: CMD has always accepted foundation contributions and rejected contributions from businesses (with the stated exception of CREDO, an explicitly activist liberal cellphone service provider).

Internet evidence from 2010, however, indicates that CMD had jettisoned its previous prohibition against receiving contributions directly from labor unions. While CMD discloses a non-comprehensive list of foundation



Credit: World Travel & Tourism Council. License: <https://goo.gl/16QB8k>.

*The Center for Media and Democracy grew out of the far-left environmentalist and anti-capitalist movements launched by Jeremy Rifkin (above) and the Foundation on Economic Trends, where John Stauber worked before founding CMD.*

contributors, the substantial monies CMD receives from labor unions are only identifiable through the unions’ back door—their annual disclosures to the U.S. Department of Labor. This change came precisely as Scott Walker and a Republican-controlled legislature took power in Wisconsin with an ambitious agenda that would culminate in Act 10, the public-employee union reform law that would catapult Walker to the national stage.

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*The left-wing New York City alt-weekly The Village Voice commented, “[Stauber and Rampton] come from the far side of liberal.”*

With support from unions and progressive foundations, Center for Media and Democracy’s efforts now focus on supporting the unions’ and labor-aligned progressives’ assault on free-market state-level policy groups. CMD has published websites attacking the American Legislative Exchange



*John Stauber, CMD's founder, is an old-line radical who began his political involvement in the anti-Vietnam War movement of the 1960s; he carried this opposition to American military involvements over to CMD.*

Council—an association of pro-free-market state legislators—and the State Policy Network, an association of free-market think tanks focusing on state-level policy. CMD has also published talking points for left-wing activists to use to attack these groups; then-Michigan AFL-CIO president Karla Swift plagiarized them in a column for the *Detroit News*.

## CMD FUNDING AND ITS HYPOCRISY ON DISCLOSURE

Most of the Center for Media and Democracy's revenue is traceable to known organizational contributors. CMD provides a partial list of these contributors on its website, but the list obscures important sources of CMD funding, because it does not include donor-advised funds or labor union contributions to the organization.

The Center for Media and Democracy is principally funded by left-wing foundations, most significantly the Schumann Center for Media and Democracy associated with Bill Moyers, who is the left-wing former PBS presenter who served as Lyndon Johnson's White House press secretary in the 1960s. In 2013, the Schumann Center provided CMD with \$250,000—more than 28 percent of the organization's

revenues. Other substantial foundation funders to CMD from recent years include the Park Foundation (a prominent anti-fracking funder), the Public Welfare Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the Tides Foundation, and progressive financier George Soros's Foundation to Promote an Open Society.

But CMD—which attacks anonymous conservative speech with zealous vigor—was hiding something. The Center for Media and Democracy's largest recent contributions came in the form of \$520,000 from the Schwab Charitable Fund, a donor-advised fund provider that allows donors to obscure their identities when donating money. These two \$260,000 contributions (according to CMD) added up to 60 percent of CMD's revenue in 2012. Naturally, CMD does not list Schwab as a funder on its website.

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*CMD's largest contribution of \$520,000 came from the Schwab Charitable Fund, a donor-advised fund that allows donors to obscure their identities.*

After conservative groups exposed CMD's hypocrisy for attacking free-market groups that received anonymous contributions, Lisa Graves argued that “This is a grant we received from an unknown donor, we literally don't know the name of the man or woman who gave the funds.” The timing of this contribution was such that 30 percent of CMD's revenue in both 2011 and 2012 came from the “dark money” Schwab grant. To call Graves's denial “implausible” is charitable.

Graves later attempted to argue that liberal donors' use of the Schwab Charitable Fund to contribute to her organization was different from conservative contributors' use of similar donor-advised funds to support free-market groups—an assertion a California-based financial planner called “a bunch of baloney.”

In fact, Graves—like many advocates of pre-*Citizens United* campaign finance regulations—openly argues for a double standard, under which liberal money is pure and conservative money is somehow tainted. She alleges that “The question of conservative funders versus liberal funders, I think, is a matter of false equivalency,” claiming that conservative and libertarian contributors support “corporate interests” and implying left-wing funders are pure in motive and represent the will of the American people.



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*For Graves, conservative money was tainted, while left-wing funders were pure in motive and represented the will of the American people.*

Of course, CMD takes money from the most impure and most special of progressive special interests, while hiding the source of this cash. National labor unions have contributed \$382,730 to the Center for Media and Democracy since 2012, according to the unions' Department of Labor annual filings. In the years since CMD changed its previous prohibition on accepting contributions from labor unions, the Service Employees International Union; American Federation of Teachers; National Education Association; American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees; and AFL-CIO have given money to CMD.

## ATTACKS ON STATE-LEVEL FREE-MARKET POLICY GROUPS

Center for Media and Democracy has raised its profile since 2010 by choosing a variety of trendy left-wing conspiracy theories to endorse. CMD runs campaigns attacking the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) and State Policy Network, which are nonpartisan associations of free-market state and local legislators and free-market state-level policy organizations, respectively.

ALEC was the first of the state-level policy groups to face CMD's wrath. Amid national controversy over the death of Trayvon Martin, CMD launched "ALEC Exposed," a project attempting to tie ALEC's past support of "stand your ground" self-defense laws to Martin's death. In addition to public attacks, CMD has filed numerous—estimates exceed 2,500—open records requests with state legislators and state officials seeking any correspondence that those individuals have sent to or received from ALEC.

The underlying goal was to "controversialize" ALEC, making this previously bipartisan convening of business- and market-friendly legislators toxic for Democratic legislators. The campaign nearly succeeded; only a timely change of management at ALEC with the appointment of the aggressive former Visa executive Lisa Nelson saved them from a Center for Media and Democracy-led smear campaign.



*Lisa Graves, CMD's executive director, openly argues for a double standard, under which liberal money is pure and conservative money is somehow tainted.*

Credit: pruvich. License: <https://goo.gl/323jqZ>.

CMD has also attacked the State Policy Network, a federation of free-market state policy groups. As one of its smear-tactic tools, in 2014 CMD published a website openly attacking what it insultingly called "StinkTanks."

Consistent with its duplicity on funding, the Center for Media and Democracy is fine with national liberal and left-wing groups that engage in state-level advocacy, but not with conservative groups doing the same. CMD has worked closely with liberal state policy organization State Innovation Exchange (SiX) and its predecessor organizations the American Legislative and Issue Campaign Exchange, Progressive States Network, and Center for State Innovation. All of these were modeled on the conservative State Policy Network.

## PEOPLE

Lisa Graves has been the executive director of Center for Media and Democracy since 2009. Graves made her career in progressive and Democratic Party politics, serving as a staffer in President Bill Clinton's Justice Department and for the Senate Judiciary Committee when it was chaired by Vermont Democrat Patrick Leahy, a notoriously ruthless partisan. She later worked for the American Civil Liberties Union as a legislative strategist during the 2000s.

CMD deputy director Mary Bottari, also a former Democratic Senate staffer, worked for Wisconsin's Russ Feingold in the 1990s. She later spent time working for the Naderite group Public Citizen on its anti-trade campaigns and is married to John Nichols, a national affairs correspondent for the leftist magazine *The Nation*.

Besides the directors, many of CMD's current and former staffers have strong ties to numerous progressive groups: Their research director, Nick Surgey, is an alumnus of Common Cause, and Jay Ristenberg, another Common Cause veteran who worked as a campus canvasser for President Barack Obama's 2008 campaign, has also worked for CMD. Calvin Sloan, a CMD author, was formerly a registered lobbyist for People for the American Way, a group whose smears of Reagan's Supreme Court nominee Robert Bork gave birth to the term "borking." The list goes on.

## CONCLUSION

The reputations enjoyed by Center for Media and Democracy—and its sister organizations, PR Watch and SourceWatch—as disinterested watchdog groups are entirely undeserved. Rather, they are radical advocacy groups, the rotten fruit of a poisoned tree of conspiratorial progressivism from the far-left wing. ■

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## INVASION OF THE SPECIES: WHAT'S A SPECIES ANYWAY?

When it comes to dealing with certain prickly environmental problems, the federal government is clueless  
by Scott J. Cameron, with a post script by Dr. Steven J. Allen

**Summary:** *In our January issue, Scott J. Cameron explained an important point regarding government policy on endangered species: that environmentalists and their bureaucratic allies often fail to deal appropriately with environmental threats because they fail to recognize the role of invasive species in causing those threats. Instead of dealing with the invasive species problem, they target infrastructure projects and jobs-creating businesses. Below, Scott J. Cameron addresses the definition and history of invasive species; Dr. Steven J. Allen weighs in on the importance of the power to define the issues.*

The term “invasive species” has been a part of the scientific vernacular for several decades now. An earlier and closely related concept of animal and plant “pests” probably goes back many thousands of years to ancient Egyptian and Mesopotamian efforts at agriculture and the first construction of granaries to hold surplus agricultural product. The pests in question for the ancient Egyptians were the rats and mice who fed on their stored grains, not to mention the biblical clouds of locusts that stripped their fields bare. While several federal laws address issues surrounding invasive species, U.S. law contains *no single comprehensive definition* of the term. The generally accepted definition is found in Executive Order 13112, signed by President Bill Clinton on February 3, 1999: EO 13112 defines an invasive species as one alien to these shores, whose introduction causes or might cause economic, harm to native species, or worse—harm to public health.

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*Executive Order 13112 defines an invasive species as one alien to these shores whose introduction might cause harm to native species or to public health.*

While there certainly exist troublesome native species—think of coyotes in the West or white-tailed deer munching

the garden hedges of Mid-Atlantic suburbia—these animals cannot be called invasive species since they are not alien at all. They are indigenous; they have been a part of the North American landscape for millions of years.

## INVASIVE SPECIES: UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU'RE DEALING WITH

“Alien,” for our purposes, is typically understood to mean a non-native species, a stranger to North America. When such a species threatens our economy, environmental quality, or public health, it qualifies as invasive. Of these three areas of concern, public health issues are obviously the most important. If an alien species sends us to the hospital or kills us, that species is demonstrably invasive.

The economic test is also fairly straightforward: If an alien species devastates cash crops, destroys forests, or increases costs borne by public utility consumers, then the economic impact is clear. However, sometimes this situation is more complex and ambiguous than it might seem at first: From time to time the invasive species in question may create great economic benefits for some, while causing economic or environmental damage to others. The deliberate introduction of the striped bass, a game fish native to coastal New Jersey into the San Francisco Bay-Delta estuary is a perfect example of a complex environmental situation involving invasive species. The striped bass, a prized sport fish and good eating, especially grilled, has been a boost to Northern California tourism and its recreational fishing industry. Unfortunately, the striped bass is a voracious fish and likes to eat a smaller fish known as the delta smelt. Because of the striped bass's outsized appetite, the humble delta smelt is now listed as an endangered species under the federal Endangered Species Act.

*Scott J. Cameron is a former Deputy Assistant Secretary at the Department of the Interior.*



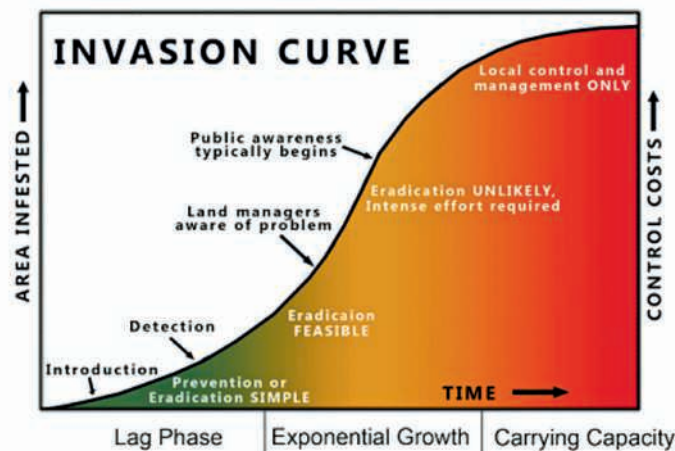
In an attempt to protect the delta smelt, the federal government has spent hundreds of millions of federal taxpayer dollars and imposed billions of dollars in costs on California farmers and other water users. These food providers have been deprived of precious water needed to produce crops. Meanwhile, California water utilities have been forced to protect the smelt at the cost of higher rates for their customers. Here's the irony of the situation: To the Central Valley farmer, the striped bass is an invasive species that is costing him money; but to the fishing tackle vendors, boat rental companies, and fishing guides, this hungry, aggressive fish is a welcome source of income.

But more frequently, the environmental harm caused by invasive species is obvious to everyone: consider the impact of Burmese pythons on South Florida populations of native birds, mammals, and reptiles. Other cases are more ambiguous. The zebra and quagga mussels, for example, which hitched a ride in the ballast of foreign ships coming down the St. Lawrence Seaway, have rapidly multiplied and become incredible pests in the Great Lakes where they depress populations of certain fish species. These days the invasive mussels are everywhere, covering every underwater surface. But they also bring an unforeseen benefit: the alien mussels filter so much otherwise murky lake water that they have greatly improved water clarity—a boon to sport divers and marine salvage operations. They have also been responsible for higher populations of some native species that feed on them.

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*Environmental scientists estimate that 50,000 exotic species live in the United States, but perhaps only 1 percent exhibit invasive characteristics.*

Clearly, not all immigrants cause problems. And not every alien or exotic species is invasive. Environmental scientists estimate that 50,000 exotic species live in the United States. Of these, Harvard biologist E.O. Wilson guesses that perhaps ten percent find their way into the wild. Ten percent of this thin slice exhibit invasive characteristics. So only about one percent of the exotic organisms found in the United States are actually problematic. Being called exotic means simply that an organism evolved elsewhere. The quality of “invasiveness” describes behavior: whether or not that exotic species behaves in a problematic way in its new environment. Many exotic species are incredibly valuable to our economy,



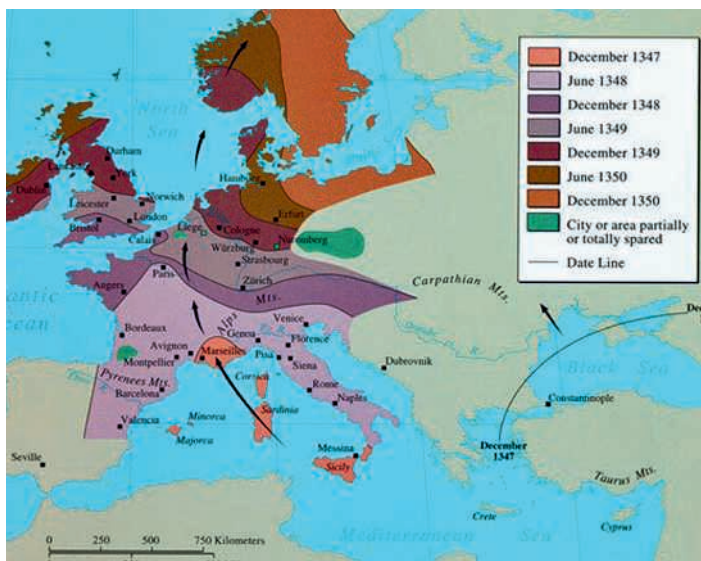
*Environmentalists and their bureaucratic allies often fail to deal appropriately with environmental threats because they fail to recognize the role of invasive species in causing those threats.*

and provide a good deal of the food Americans eat. Here are some examples: Watermelon hails from central Africa; from the eastern Mediterranean region we get asparagus, beets, broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, celery, endive, kale, lettuce, parsley, parsnips and rhubarb. Carrots and onions originate in the Middle East; Brussels sprouts come from Northern Europe; the artichoke from Italy. Peas come from Eurasia; spinach from Iran. India has given the world four widely consumed vegetables: cucumber, eggplant, mustard, and cowpeas. Radishes and soybeans are Japanese and Chinese in origin; from China alone comes peaches, oranges, and apricots. Apples, pears, and cherries originated in the hill country around the Black and Caspian Seas. The date palm is a flowering tree native to Arabia and Egypt. Olive trees originated in Greece, Syria and Egypt. Figs came from Syria; wheat, oats, and barley also originated in the Near East. Rice and millet come from Asia...

Good luck finding a dinner table that doesn't contain one or more of the above “exotics”!

## A CHALLENGE FOR CENTURIES

The spread of the Black Death from the steppes of Asia to Europe was, arguably, the most devastating impact of an invasive species in human history. The Black Death, caused by the deadly bacterium, *Yersinia pestis*, carried in the bloodstream of rats, is transmitted by bites from fleas who feed on rat blood, hopping from rats to human hosts. Rats infested the crowded cities of Europe; offal and waste tossed into the narrow streets, byproducts of human activity, meant no shortage of rats—hence the Black Death. As a non-European pathological organism



*International trade facilitated rapid transcontinental movement of the rat/flea/bacteria vector across Europe from 1346 to 1353.*

*Y. pestis* fits the definition of invasive species in the worst possible way. How was it spread? The answer is both simple and complex: International trade facilitated rapid transcontinental movement of the rat/flea/bacteria vector across Europe from 1346 to 1353, and international trade remains the primary mechanism for movement of invasive species today. In medieval times, contaminated rats moved with trans-Asian caravans and crawled into the holds of trading ships, from which they spread from seaport to seaport, ultimately reaching every corner of continental Europe.

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*The spread of the Black Death from the steppes of Asia to Europe was, arguably, the most devastating impact of an invasive species in human history.*

Black Death mortality estimates vary—it’s hard to pinpoint the number of dead when entire towns vanish and records disappear into the maw of the moth-eaten centuries—but by some calculations about 60 percent of Europe’s population of about 80 million people died. That’s a loss of 50 million lives, making the Black Death one of the most traumatic episodes in the history of the West, rivaling the fall of the Roman Empire in its sociological significance.

About two centuries after the Black Death ravaged Europe, European immigration to the New World resulted in yet another introduction of invasive disease organisms—this time into native American populations. Scholars’ guesstimates of population figures for the Americas just before the great age of European exploration vary wildly: some say as low as six million, others as high as 75 or 100 million. Whatever the correct number, this population shrank by perhaps 90 percent over the next three centuries, primarily due to virulent diseases of European origin. The first introduction of a European disease likely occurred when Columbus, on his second voyage in 1493, brought along Spanish livestock infected with influenza germs. These quickly spread to the native inhabitants of the island of Hispaniola, and then across the Caribbean and into Florida. Smallpox, measles, bubonic plague, typhoid fever, diphtheria, and other invasive disease organisms followed.

But it was smallpox, probably the most virulent European disease to invade the Americas, that killed between 50 and 95 percent of exposed populations. Spanish explorers brought it to the Caribbean around 1507; from there it made the jump to Central America. Over the next three centuries, wave after wave of smallpox epidemics—and outbreaks of other killing European diseases—crushed Native American populations. Had Europeans deliberately waged biological warfare on Native Americans? Of course not. The genocide was completely accidental: One must credit Victorian scientists with the discovery of germ theory, not well understood until the late 19th century.

Invasive diseases also ravage non-human communities: In 1904, a shipment of Asian chestnut saplings entering New York City from Japan became the unintended source of an invasive fungus known as chestnut blight. Before the turn of the last century, the American chestnut tree had been a dominant and beautiful component of forests in the eastern United States. A keystone species in the eastern forests, it represented 25 percent of the trees in our deciduous forests and provided food for a wide variety of animals with its nutritious nuts. Chestnut blight spores, carried by the wind, soon resulted in a crash of American chestnut populations, killing an estimated 4 billion American trees by 1940—that is close to 95 percent of the trees that existed before the invasion! True, American chestnut seedlings can sprout from the dead trunks of older trees, but the blight usually kills the new trees before they mature and reproduce. Efforts to hybridize the few remaining isolated American chestnuts with blight-resistant Asian varieties are currently underway. In this manner, it is hoped a form of chestnut might be reintroduced into eastern American forests. Genetic engineering might also save the American chestnut:



scientists have isolated a gene present in wheat that fights the biochemistry of the fungus and have pioneered its successful introduction into American chestnut varieties.

Around the peak lethality of the chestnut blight, another Asian invader entered the United States, this time indirectly, from Europe: Dutch elm disease. This disease is a fungus spread by an invasive bark beetle that made its way from China to Europe around 1910. During World War I, European elms began to die inexplicably in large numbers. Battle-weary societies initially thought the trees had been killed by the poison gas used to such lethal effect on the Western Front. Nature herself, it seemed, had been caught up in the storm of man-made destruction. But eventually, sober Dutch scientists traced the cause to an Asian fungus, transmitted by insects.

America remained untouched by the disease until 1931, when a Cleveland furniture company unknowingly imported infected European elm logs and thus, European elm bark beetles, from the Netherlands. Now the virulent fungus found ready purchase in the United States. Unlike the chestnut blight, which primarily affected forested suburban and rural areas, the Dutch elm disease caused the most damage in American cities. There, the beautiful American elm had been a much treasured shade tree, planted along urban streets in countless neighborhoods in the Midwest and northeast. They often grew to 100 feet in height, spreading a wide canopy of green shade. Soon, American elm trees began to die. They died by the hundreds of thousands, a great arboreal mortality that reduced property values, increased air conditioning bills, placed higher demands on city budgets compelled for reasons of public safety to remove and dispose of massive trees carcasses. Last but not least, the elm die-off deprived many communities of their calming, leafy beauty. Between 1930 and 1989, an estimated 75 percent of the 77 million elms in North America perished.

Control efforts initially focused on insecticides to kill the exotic elm bark beetles that transmitted the fungus, but a more effective strategy focused on the fungus itself. Unfortunately, by the time effective controls had been developed, the damage to the noble North American elm had already been done.

## ISLAND EXTINCTIONS

While continent-wide impacts of invasive species have been dramatic and ecologically severe, their most catastrophic impacts can be seen in island ecosystems.

Of the 724 species gone extinct over the course of the last four centuries, about half were island species. At least 90



*Indigenous endangered species, native to the North American landscape for possibly millions of years.*

percent of extinct bird species, for example, once found their habitat on islands. Island species are much more vulnerable to extinction precisely because they live on islands and experience a limited geographic range. In other words, when alien predators show up, island species have no place to go. Also, island species often experience low population numbers, another effect of a limited range. Thus, they are especially vulnerable to the introduction of predators which related mainland species have long learned to avoid. Many species on remote Pacific and Indian Ocean islands have been driven to extinction by invasive species.

Here's a classic example from the island of Guam: During World War II the brown tree snake, a stowaway on naval vessels and warplanes from the Asian mainland, reached Guam with U.S. forces. Since then, this slippery, voracious creature has decimated Guam's native species. Over half of Guam's unique assortment of birds and lizard species, as well as two out of three native bat species, have been driven to extinction by the snake. And weirdly, the creature has an affinity for crawling into electrical distribution facilities where its presence has caused thousands of



blackouts over the last 40 years: The lights go out on Guam when the brown tree snake touches live and grounded conductors simultaneously, posing a threat to U.S. military installations and causing economic disruptions.

I'll leave the last word on the implications of island extinctions to Dr. Steven J. Allen of the Capital Research Center:

Sometimes I ask people to guess how many bird and mammal species have gone extinct in the last couple of hundred years, other than on islands. When I tell them the number is eight to 15 species, birds and mammals combined, they look at me funny. They say, that can't be right! But it is. And it's evidence that we need to re-think our approach to the endangered species problem.

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*Over half of Guam's unique assortment of birds and lizard species, as well as two out of three native bat species, have been driven to extinction by the brown tree snake.*

## INVASIVE SPECIES IN AMERICAN LAW

The oldest federal law dealing with invasive species actually pre-dates the popular use of the term: Called the Lacey Act and passed by Congress in 1900, this law has been amended several times over the last hundred or so years. Lacey has a number of stern provisions; the one that addresses what we now know as invasive species authorizes the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) of the Department of the Interior to decide which species it deems “injurious” and to publish regulations regarding those species. Lacey Act restrictions regulate the importation and transport of these injurious species, including offspring and eggs. Wild mammals, wild birds, fish, mollusks, crustaceans, amphibians, and reptiles can be added at any time to the injurious wildlife list which currently includes about 240 species. These proscribed species may not be imported or transported without a permit issued by FWS; permits are occasionally granted for bona fide scientific, medical, educational, or zoological purposes—though there are complications: A recent U.S. District Court decision called into question the Lacey Act's jurisdiction over interstate commerce; the United States is appealing the District Court's decision as inconsistent with 116 years of statutory interpretation.

In 1955, the U.S. and Canada responded to the impact of the invasive sea lamprey on the fisheries of the Great Lakes by launching an international effort that involved both U.S. state and Canadian provincial governments. As it turned out, the opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway to oceangoing vessels had also opened the way for the sea lamprey to enter the Great Lakes. The Fish and Wildlife Service was the lead federal agency in the fight against the lamprey; this fight resulted in the creation of the Great Lakes Fishery Commission. FWS has since then been the primary federal agency with responsibility for managing aquatic invasive species.

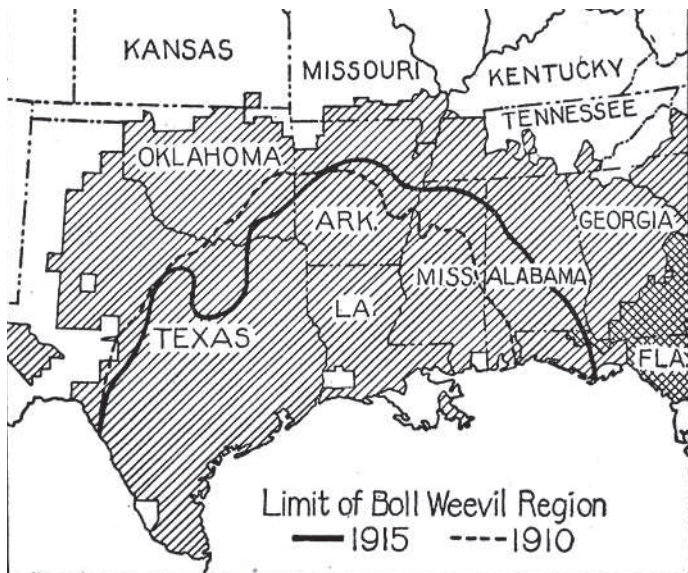
Now, the Nonindigenous Aquatic Nuisance Prevention and Control Act (NANPCA), passed by Congress in 1990, deals comprehensively with aquatic invasive species. Among these are the water-borne pests of the Great Lakes, which are also infesting other national watersheds—many of them carried in ships' ballast water. NANPCA required EPA and Coast Guard to regulate ballast water in an effort to reduce the risk of invasive species being transported into the United States. The Act also authorized research funding on aquatic invasives and set up a network of intergovernmental regional aquatic nuisance-species task forces. These task forces facilitate interagency coordination on aquatic invasives on a regional basis. The Act also authorized a program to more effectively control our old friend the brown tree snake on Guam.

## AGRICULTURE AUTHORITIES & OTHERS

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has long dealt with invasive species in the United States, wielding a wide authority provided by Congress. One of its very first challenges took the form of the boll weevil, when this insect first crossed the Rio Grande to invade U.S. soil from Mexico in the 1890s. The boll weevil soon became a major threat to American cotton agriculture, costing cotton growers tens of millions of dollars in lost revenue annually.

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Meanwhile, the first federal regulation of plant imports began with the Plant Quarantine Act of 1912. Eighty-eight years later, USDA's statutory authority dealing with plant pests comes under the jurisdiction of the Plant Protection Act. The USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is responsible for combating invasive species, though USDA's extensive research agencies also play an important role, as does the U.S. Forest Service. APHIS protects our agriculture in partnership with the Department of Homeland Security to keep pests from entering the country; both agencies often



*The boll weevil infestation from Mexico in the 1890s soon became a major threat to American cotton agriculture, costing cotton growers tens of millions of dollars in lost revenue annually.*

work with states to coordinate eradication programs of invasive species. USDA also deals with invasive and native pests through its authority under the Animal Damage Control Act of 1931. This act designates a variety of birds and mammals, such as European starlings and native coyotes, as threats to indigenous crops and livestock. The U.S. Forest Service's role regarding invasive species supervises efforts to protect forests from native and invasive insect pests that kill trees. As we have seen, tree mortality damages forest ecosystems and urban sidewalks alike, reduces the value of timber, and increases the risk of catastrophic forest fires. Fighting forest fires costs the U.S. hundreds of millions of dollars per year; these fires routinely destroy homes and other structures, and all too often result in the death of firefighters and homeowners.

Again, we come to President Bill Clinton and his Executive Order 13112 on Invasive Species, signed into law in February, 1999. This prescient order established the inter-agency National Invasive Species Council co-chaired by the Secretaries of the Departments of Agriculture, the Interior, and Commerce. The Order gave Interior administrative responsibility for the Council itself. Also, a National Invasive Species Management Plan was commissioned, as well as the establishment of an external advisory committee under the Federal Advisory Committee Act; the latter was supposed to kick-start invasive species management efforts. But its effectiveness has been limited by budget concerns and the energy of the career civil servants on the Council staff. A December 2015 Congressional oversight hearing by the Interior Subcommittee of the House Government Oversight and Government Reform Committee underscored the fact

that the Council *per se* has no management control over the actions, policy decisions, and budget priorities of its current roster of 13 member agencies.

The government's approach to invasive species is often confused and scattered. It fails to deal with the real problem of invasive species and with other serious environmental matters. If we are to protect our own endangered plants and animals from extinction; our rivers and streams from pollution; our agriculture and industry from biological threats, we have a rough road ahead. But first we need to understand that invasive species pose a clear and present danger to the nation. And we need to take action accordingly. ■

## THE "SPECIES PROBLEM":

How bureaucrats use undefined and ill-defined terms to expand their power

By Dr. Steven J. Allen

The Endangered Species Act (ESA) is an example of legislation twisted by bureaucrats into a form its sponsors and original supporters could not recognize. Often, as with the ESA, such twisting is made possible by vague and undefined terms that, in a manner the Founders never intended, give power to unelected, anonymous bureaucrats.

Take the act's title term "species." No one quite knows what a species is. The common definition says a species is a group of living things that can produce fertile offspring with each other but not with members of other groups. But lions and tigers and many other pairings of members of apparently different species can produce fertile offspring, and many plants and most microorganisms reproduce without breeding. Scientists have a number of definitions of species, but each has its own ambiguities and, as scientists say, fuzziness. This problem is so well recognized it even has a name: "the species problem."

Because no accepted scientific definition of species exists, bureaucrats can classify any group of animals, plants, or other living things as a species. Should vertebrates—animals with backbones—be given priority over invertebrates? Yes, according to some Congressional directives, and no, according to others. Can a subspecies, or just a "segment" or "population" of plants or animals that clearly doesn't meet the qualifications for a species, be a species simply because the government calls it a species? Yes, nonsensically.

Often, the legal status of a species or other recognized grouping of living things is based on a "sue-and-settle" model. That's when an interest group, such as an environmental organization, sues a government agency to take a certain

action—for example, designating something as an endangered species—and the bureaucrats roll over and decline to defend themselves. The plaintiffs win, and the court orders the bureaucrats to do the thing they wanted to do all along.

Thus, the lack of clarity on the term “species” is a godsend to bureaucrats and interest groups.

In a 2007 article in the *UCLA Journal of Environmental Law & Policy*, Ezequiel Lugo wrote, “The term ‘species’ is central to all of biology, yet it is ambiguous and has no universally accepted definition. A major difficulty with any definition of species is the tacit assumption that a species is a clearly delineated group because species are really ‘fuzzy sets’ with unclear demarcations.” In other words, it’s not really possible to say with certainty where one species ends and another begins.

Among the different methods for classifying species, Lugo noted, are “the morphological species concept, which defines a species based on a set of shared physical characteristics,” “the phylogenetic species concept, which defines a species as a group of organisms sharing at least one unique characteristic and having a common pattern of ancestry and descent,” and “the biological species concept, which defines a species as a naturally interbreeding group of organisms.” There are other methods, too.

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*Pluto has been reduced to the status of an icy chunk of rock orbiting an indifferent sun.*

“Species,” like many scientific classifications, is one of those handy categories created for the convenience of human beings. Unlike the average scientist or politician, nature does not put things into neat boxes. Take Pluto, now designated a “planet-like object.” For most of the 20th Century we were told Pluto belonged with the other planets in our solar system. Now its planetary status has been stripped by cosmologists and Pluto has been reduced to the status of an icy chunk of rock orbiting an indifferent sun. So, it boils down to this: Pluto is a planet if we call it a planet. In the same manner, convenient characterizations such as “endangered” and “threatened” have definitions that are vague and subject to interpretation, that use weasel-words like “significantly” and “likely,” and that are, therefore, the preferred toys of bureaucratic and scientific whim.

Taxonomy is the science (or the art) of putting things into categories. Much of the force of government is rooted in

taxonomy—the power to put things in categories and treat some categories differently from others. Very often, Congress delegates this awesome power to regulatory agencies and the bureaucrats employed by those agencies. Categories of “race” and “ethnicity” for example, often determine whether people get jobs, government contracts, college admissions, student aid, and so on. These categories determine how political power is distributed through the redistricting process. Yet such categories do not exist in science and nature. They are the province of the bureaucrats, who can merge and create categories, as when the Census Bureau arbitrarily merged the defunct category of “Mexican” with Cuban-Americans, Puerto Ricans, and others to create the “Hispanic” category. How different the discussion of the 2016 election would have been if categories had been different—if, say, German-Americans, the country’s largest ethnic group, had been treated as a separate category, or if Appalachians had been so treated, or Italians, or if African-Americans with Caribbean ancestors had been separated from other African-Americans, or if Indian-Americans had remained classified as “white” rather than Asian.

Similarly, bureaucrats arbitrarily decide where the poverty line lies, thereby directing the flow of trillions of dollars of taxpayers’ money. (Poor people exist, of course, as do beautiful people and ugly people. But bureaucrats can no more determine the number of poor people objectively than they can determine objectively the number of people who are “beautiful” and “ugly.”)

“Carcinogen,” “renewable” sources of energy, “inflation” and “unemployment” rates, “assault weapons,” “invasive species”—these are just a few of the ill-defined or undefined terms that, in the hands of the Washington bureaucracy, become things of wax to shape as they please. Therein lies much of the power of the bureaucracy, a branch of government the authors of the Constitution never envisioned and upon which they would look in horror.

*Dr. Steven J. Allen (JD, PhD) is vice president & chief investigative officer of the Capital Research Center. This article includes material from the February 2013 issue of Green Watch and from the CRC blog.*

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