

THE REPUBLICAN-RIGHT'S IRON CURTAIN OF POLITICAL INFLUENCE

How the
Republican-Right
Controls
American Politics

&

What Must
Be Done to
Create a Healthy
Democracy

DEMOCRACY ALLIANCE



COS
COMMITTEE ON STATES

SUMMER 2017

INTRODUCTION

There are many ways citizens of a democracy influence politics, including writing letters, calling their representatives, organizing others to support or oppose policy proposals, marching in the streets, contributing to, or voting for candidates of their choice.

Citizen activism is the beating heart of democracy. Whether on-line or in the streets, whether spontaneously unleashed by unaffiliated citizens or supported by local, state or national organizations, the functioning of our democracy is dependent on how we participate as citizens, donors and voters.

This report presents a **quantitative snapshot** of how American citizens, through the **larger political institutions** we affiliate with and support, are influencing politics in the second decade of the twenty-first century. It does not attempt to measure or analyze the spirited role of local activism, or of unstructured, but highly energized, political causes and movements. These phenomena—spontaneous activism and organic movement building—deserve their own analyses, but are not the topic of this report.

What is noteworthy about the analysis herein is that the role of political parties is changing rapidly, the influence of non-party, non-candidate political organizations is dramatically increasing, and therefore the source of political influence in America is shifting in ways we neither fully appreciate, nor yet can fully understand. And, what is more, these dramatic shifts currently are advantaging the Republican-right and are resulting in its political dominance.

Our quantitative analysis does not attempt to identify the causes or assess the meaning of these changes. There are many theories, and heated arguments, pro and con, about how we got to this place and what these trends mean for our politics, our comity, our governing institutions, and even our national political sanity.

For Democrats, and our progressive allies, this quantitative analysis highlights a critical reality of 21st century American politics—namely, there no longer is but one institutional source of power that can assure electoral or political victory. Today, sustained political power at both the state and federal levels has ceased being dependent simply on party, ideology, reliable voters and more money. While necessary, these basic features of twentieth century politics are insufficient to build power or assure victories over the long-term.

Today, the ability to build power, be competitive in elections and policy contests, and win consistently—particularly in battleground states—increasingly requires the establishment of sophisticated non-party state-based management hubs, skilled at aligning party, candidate organizations, independent expenditure groups and non-profit groups—year in and year out—in mid-term and Presidential election cycles, ad infinitum.

This report was originally presented at the “Donor Summit on the States,” co-hosted by the Democracy Alliance and Committee on States in Washington, D.C. on March 23, 2017. The data quantifies trends in political spending and documents how the Republican-right’s non-party, non-profit, state-based political machinery has been constructed to dominate American politics in a select number of states and at the federal level.

Also included in this volume is a speech entitled “**Democracy in the Balance,**” delivered at the Donor Summit on March 23, 2017 by **Gara LaMarche, President of the Democracy Alliance**. It is a clarion call for progressives to take heed of, and to vigorously confront, the Republican-right’s exercise of political power by resisting its assaults on democracy, organizing around progressive ideals, aligning our political energies and resources, and mobilizing citizens in every region and from every walk of life to assure the freedoms, justice and opportunities for all that are the foundation of a progressive America.

We hope these materials will spark further discussion and debate, invigorate greater citizen activism, and help to re-new, re-energize and re-balance American democracy.

Sincerely,

Rob Stein

*Founder, Democracy Alliance
Co-Founder, Committee on States*

Felicia Wong

Executive Director, Roosevelt Institute

POLITICAL INFLUENCE IN AMERICA

The Republican-Right's Path to Power

a presentation by

ROB STEIN AND FELICIA WONG

originally presented at

DONOR SUMMIT ON THE STATES

Washington, D.C. • March 23, 2017

METHODOLOGY & DATA

The data in this analysis aggregates expenditures reported to the Internal Revenue Service and Federal Election Commission by political parties, candidates, “independent expenditure” organizations, as well as by individuals and firms for direct federal lobbying activities. Several independent data sites—e.g., www.opensecrets.org—are accessible sources of this information.

For information on non-profit groups that influence politics, their websites and IRS 990 Forms have been the principle sources of data.

And, finally, in some cases—e.g., union lobbying activities and average annual expenditures for state policy centers—order of magnitude spending are estimates.

This report does not attempt to document ALL federal or state spending to influence politics. However, by focusing on spending for federal elections and lobbying, and representative samplings of many of the largest Conservative and Progressive politically active non-profits, we are confident that the analysis herein fairly reflects the dimensions, trends and disparities in spending to influence both federal and state politics in America today.



HOW AMERICANS INFLUENCE POLITICS

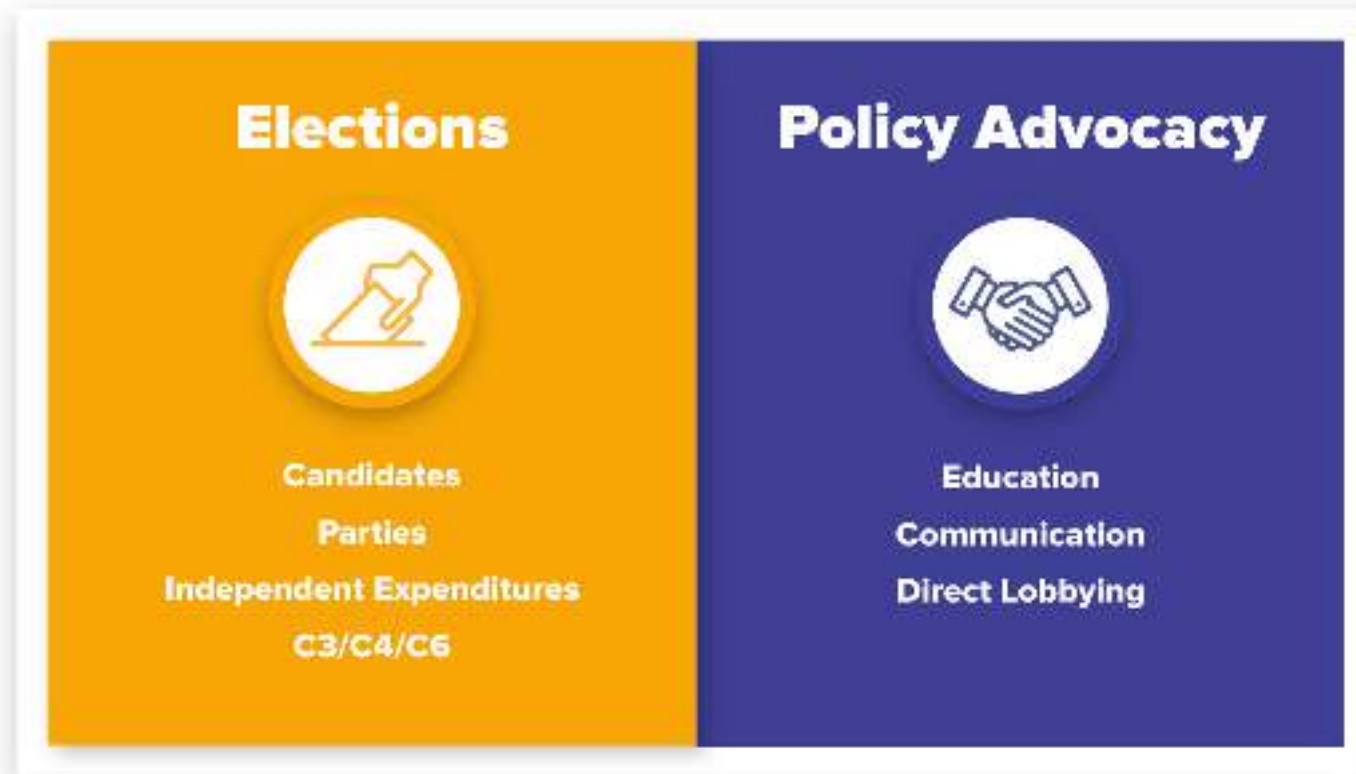
The data in this report is a quantifiable analysis of political influence—how much money has been spent by party committees, candidate campaign organizations, lobbying firms, and so-called “independent expenditure” groups.

These terms are defined herein as follows:

- **Politics** means the sum of quantifiable **electoral and lobbying** activities at the federal and state level and representative electoral spending in selected states.
- **Influence** means the power to mobilize financial resources to encourage voting for candidates for elective office or to lobby elected officials to

support or oppose specific policies. Money is not the only measure of political influence. But smart money, deployed wisely, is an essential foundation for political influence.

- **Elections** means for President, Members of the U.S. Senate and Congress, and State offices, including particularly governor and State Legislators.
- **Lobbying** means advocacy to influence federal policy through direct contact—that is, “lobbying” members of Congress to influence federal legislative actions.



INFLUENCING FEDERAL ELECTIONS AND POLICY

The following slides track how much individuals, corporations, unions and so called “independent expenditure” organizations have spent on federal elections and federal direct lobbying.

Election data is for two mid-term election cycles – 2005/2006 and 2013/2014—as well as the 2015/16 Presidential election. The lobbying data is for these same three time periods.



INFLUENCING
Federal Elections & Policy

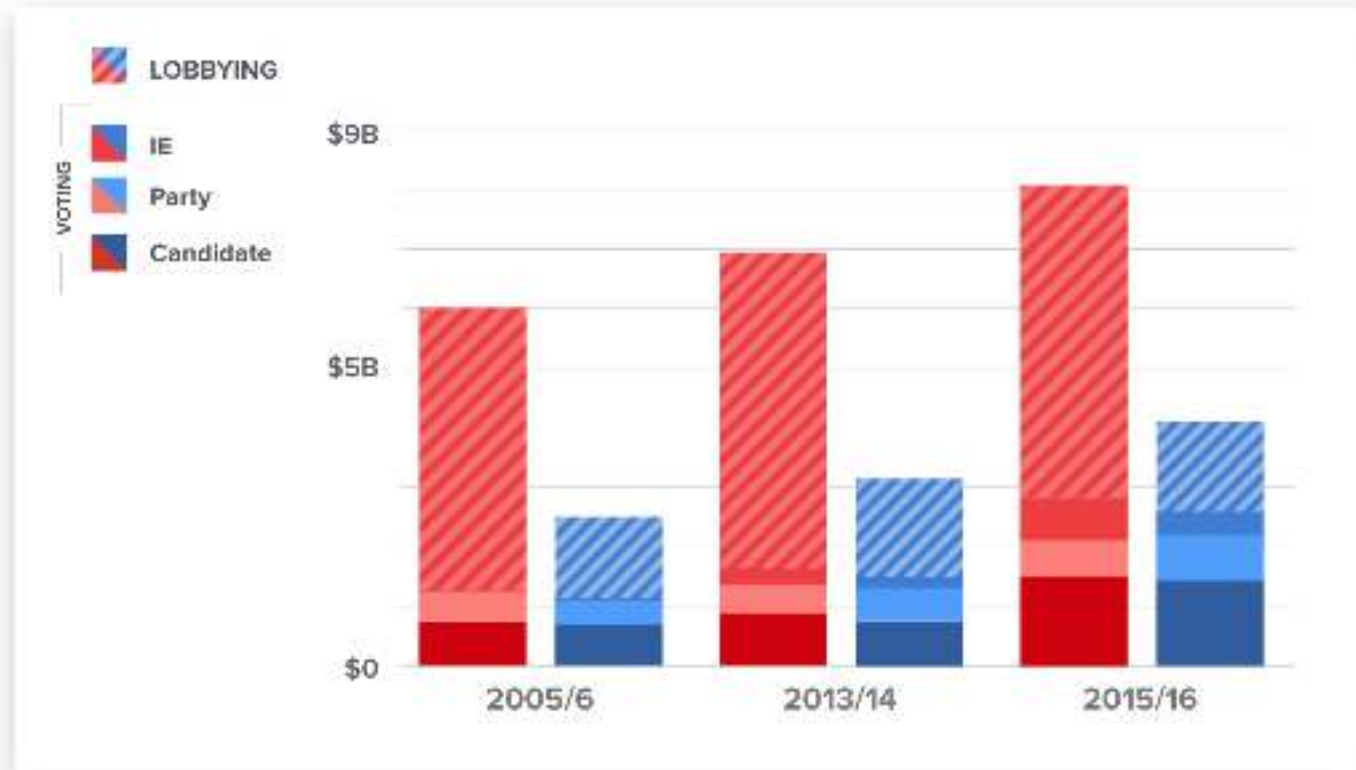
THE GRAND TOTALS OF POLITICAL INFLUENCE

The following data is included in each category:

- **Candidate** totals include BOTH primary and general election spending for ALL federal races each cycle.
- **Party** totals include primary and general election spending by both the Republican and Democratic National, Senate and Congressional campaign committees.
- **Independent Expenditure** is the term of art for **non-party** spending that directly **supports or opposes** candidates for office.

- **Lobbying** totals aggregate all reported direct lobbying of members of Congress on behalf of, or against, specific legislation.

Expenditures on influencing **both federal** elections **and federal** legislation have been combined because these integrated “grand totals” vividly illustrate the **continuum of influence** that provides the Republican-right, and their corporate allies, the **virtually unbridled political power they have today**.



THE EXPONENTIAL RISE OF INDEPENDENT EXPENDITURES

America is at the dawn of a dramatic rise of non-party independent expenditures. Between 2005/2006 and 2013/2014, this category of expenditure has risen roughly 18 times from less than \$60 million to over \$1 billion. We should expect that independent expenditures will continue to increase significantly in 2018, 2020 and beyond.



ALLOCATION OF IE SPENDING

It is important to distinguish between what the Federal Election Commission refers to as “independent expenditures”, on the one hand, and the political advocacy work of issue and constituency groups, on the other hand.

IE spending, as defined by the FEC, is electioneering that specifically supports or opposes a candidate for federal office. (Subsequent slides in this report, see pages 13-16, analyze activist non-profit political spending, only some of which is considered “independent expenditures” by the FEC.)

As recently as 2006, IE expenditures were de minimus. However, since 2009/2010, **Citizens United** invited the explosion of independent expenditure money, and so called, “Super Pacs”, which didn’t exist prior to 2010, have rapidly become the dominant IE vehicle.

By 2016, SuperPac spending was over 80% of all IE expenditures, and of this, it is estimated that more than 80% focused on Presidential primary and general elections and less than 20% on Senate and House races.



THE GROWING PRIVATIZATION OF POLITICS

This slide highlights the relative growth of IE expenditures versus party expenditures. By 2016, Republican IE spending was actually greater—55%—than party spending. For Dems, it was one-third IE/two thirds party. But note the continuing growth.

Thus, a dramatic shift is underway:

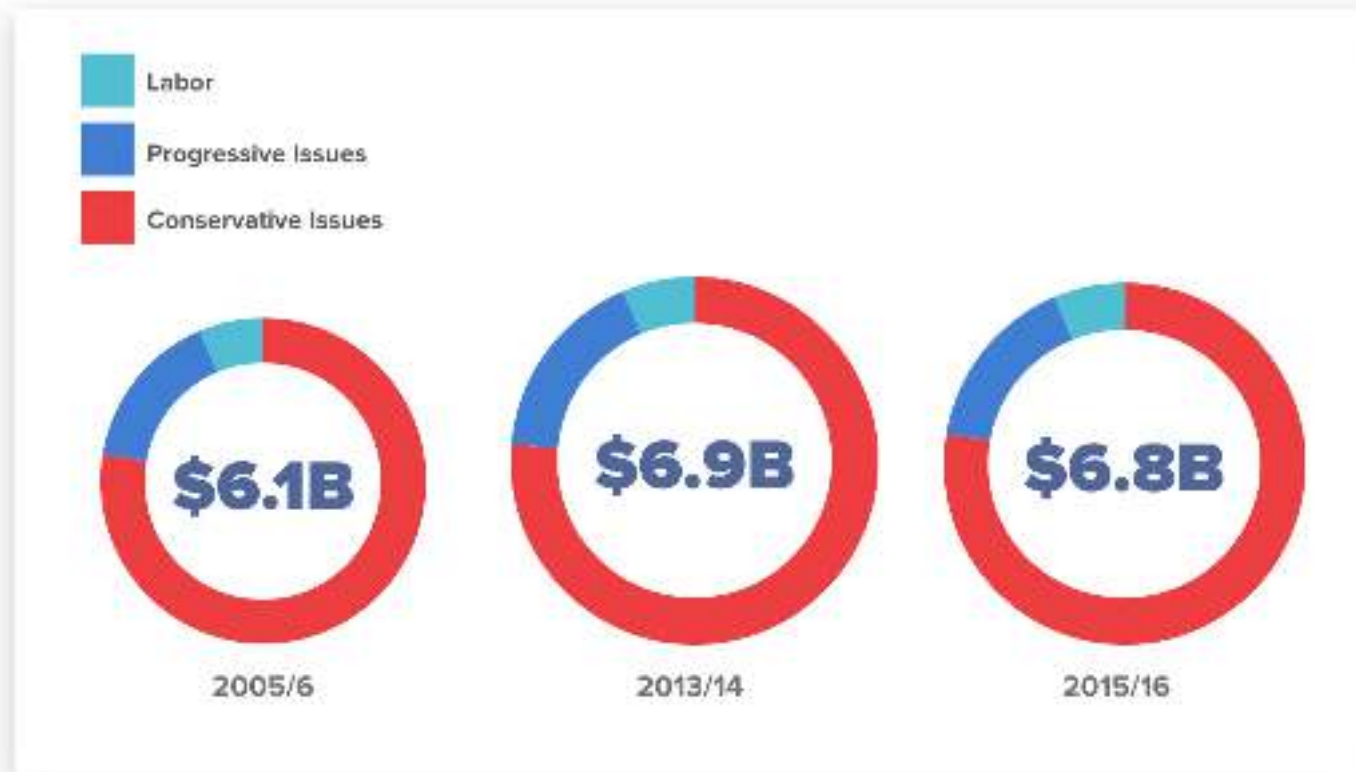
- **Non-party IE spending** is rapidly exceeding **party** spending;
- The influence of party spending is **concomitantly waning**; and
- These trends appear to be **rapidly accelerating**.



FEDERAL LOBBYING

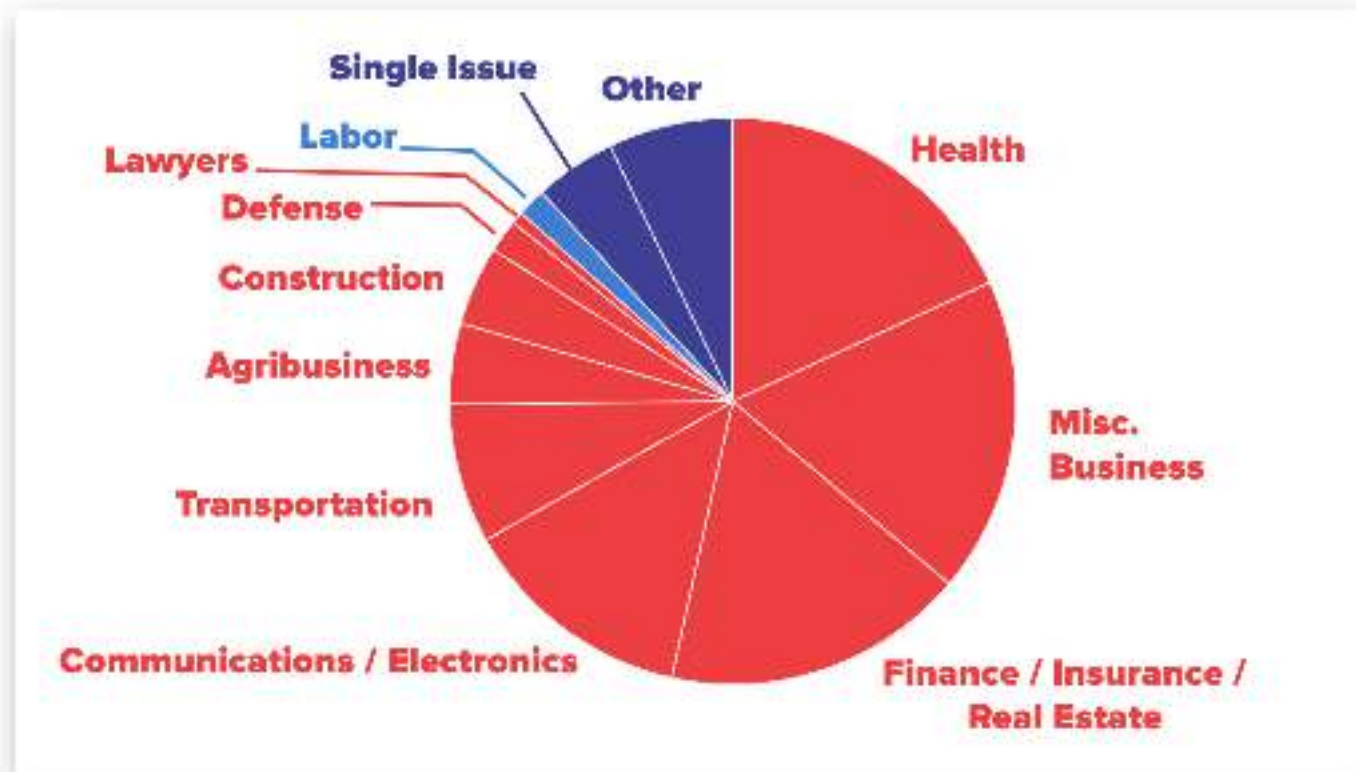
This slide highlights the following about political influence on policy:

- Nearly \$7 billion per cycle (roughly \$3.5 billion per year) is spent on federal direct lobbying, supporting thousands of lobbyists who swarm Capitol Hill supporting or opposing specific Congressional actions.
- Of this amount, nearly 80% is for lobbying on behalf Republican leaning and corporate interests; and
- Republican **electoral** success is **both** fed by corporate interests, **and** serves those interests by assuring Congressional allegiance.



FEDERAL LOBBYING BY INDUSTRY SECTOR

Roughly 75-80% of all reported federal lobbying is estimated to be by industries /interests aligned with the Republican-right's policy agenda.



ANALYSIS OF C3/C4/C6 ORGANIZATIONS

In addition to parties, candidates and **independent expenditures**, American elections are influenced by a range of activist non-profit organizations that operate at the federal and state levels. There are literally hundreds of such groups that mobilize citizens across the entire political spectrum focused on specific issues (education, healthcare, environment, guns and etc.), constituencies (women, Hispanics, African-Americans, Evangelicals, etc.) or causes (minimum wage, collective bargaining, gay marriage, and etc.).

These groups are organized, under the tax code, primarily as (1) **charitable** organizations with a primarily educational purpose (so called 501c3 groups); **social welfare** organizations that can engage in politics as long as politics are not their primary purpose (so called 501c4 organizations) and **business leagues** that have a primary purpose to advance their business interests (so called 501c6 associations).



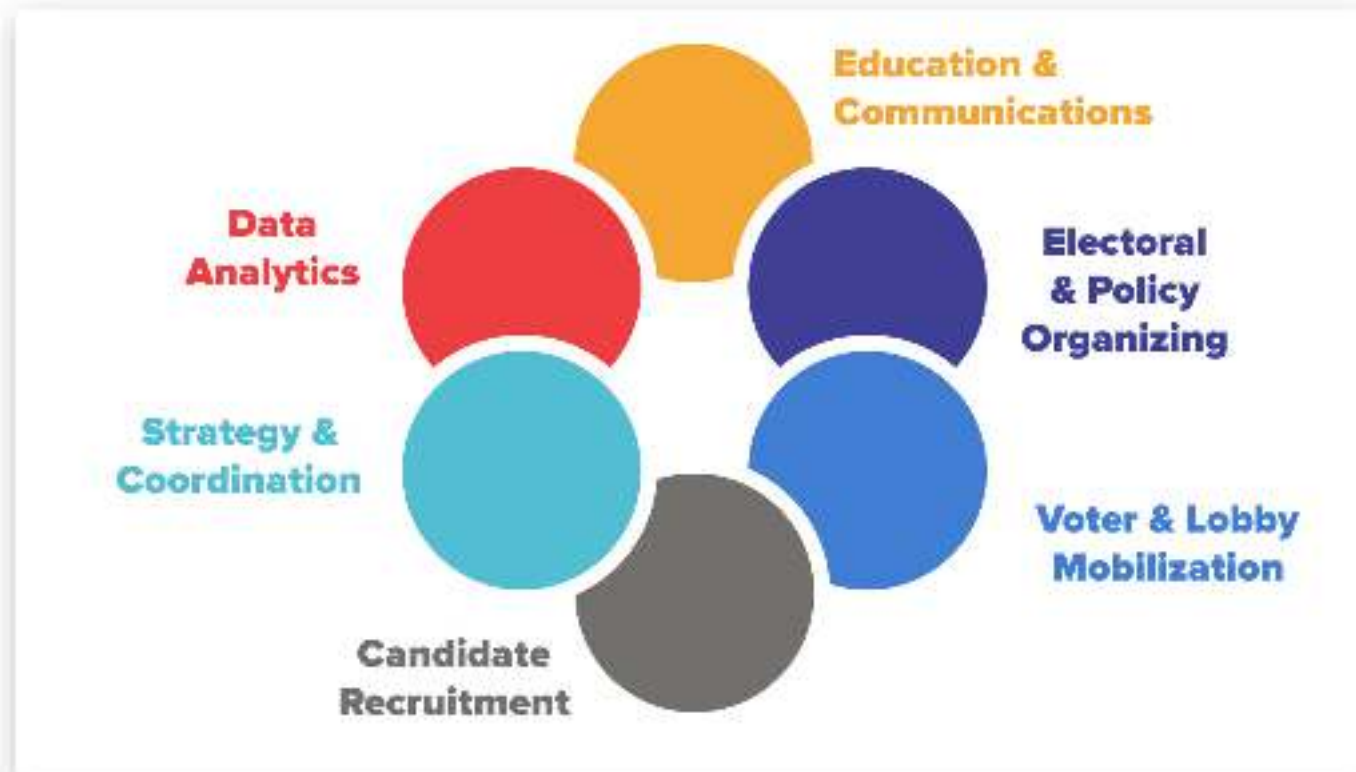
ANALYSIS OF C3/C4/C6 ORGANIZATIONS: *60 Leading Conservative & Progressive Groups*

THE ELECTORAL FUNCTIONS OF C3/C4/C6 ORGANIZATIONS

These groups develop policy ideas and educate the public, generally, and their constituencies, specifically. They organize citizens and their “members” to take actions—e.g., register to vote, promote some cause or policy, and/or vote for candidates that advance those policies. They gather and analyze voter data. They communicate via paid advertisements and “earned” media. They recruit and train political candidates. They mobilize voters. And, they coordinate amongst all these functions—and thus are critical strategically.

Historically, only parties and candidates, and well financed business associations and labor unions, performed these vital political functions. But today, in many states, issue, cause and management non-profits collectively are outspending the parties, unions and traditional associations.

Indeed, in a growing number of states, the most robust “permanent infrastructure” for influencing politics is well managed, well -financed and aligned non-profit organizations.



TOTAL SPENDING BY LEADING NON-PROFIT GROUPS

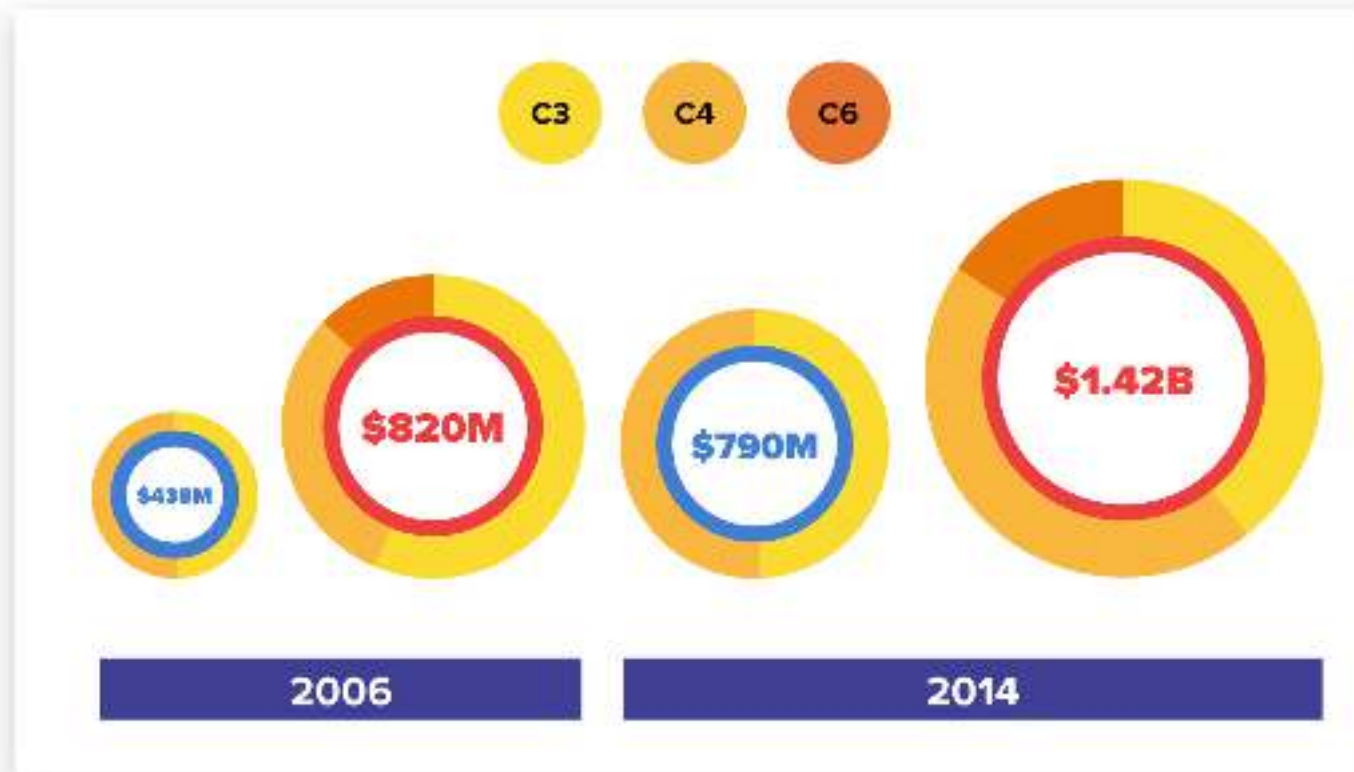
These slides highlight the spending of a representative sampling of approximately 60 leading conservative-right and 60 leading progressive groups, each of which have annual budgets in excess of \$2 million. Most of these groups have **multi-state** affiliations, chapters and physical presence.

A list of the 120 groups included in this analysis is appended to this report.

None of these groups are required by the IRS to list the names of their donors. Accordingly, while they increasingly are influencing our politics, they are doing so without transparency regarding specifically (1) what they do, (2) where they

do it, and (3) who their donors are. Unlike parties, candidates and SuperPACs, these non-profit entities operate outside of most traditional forms of public scrutiny for political institutions.

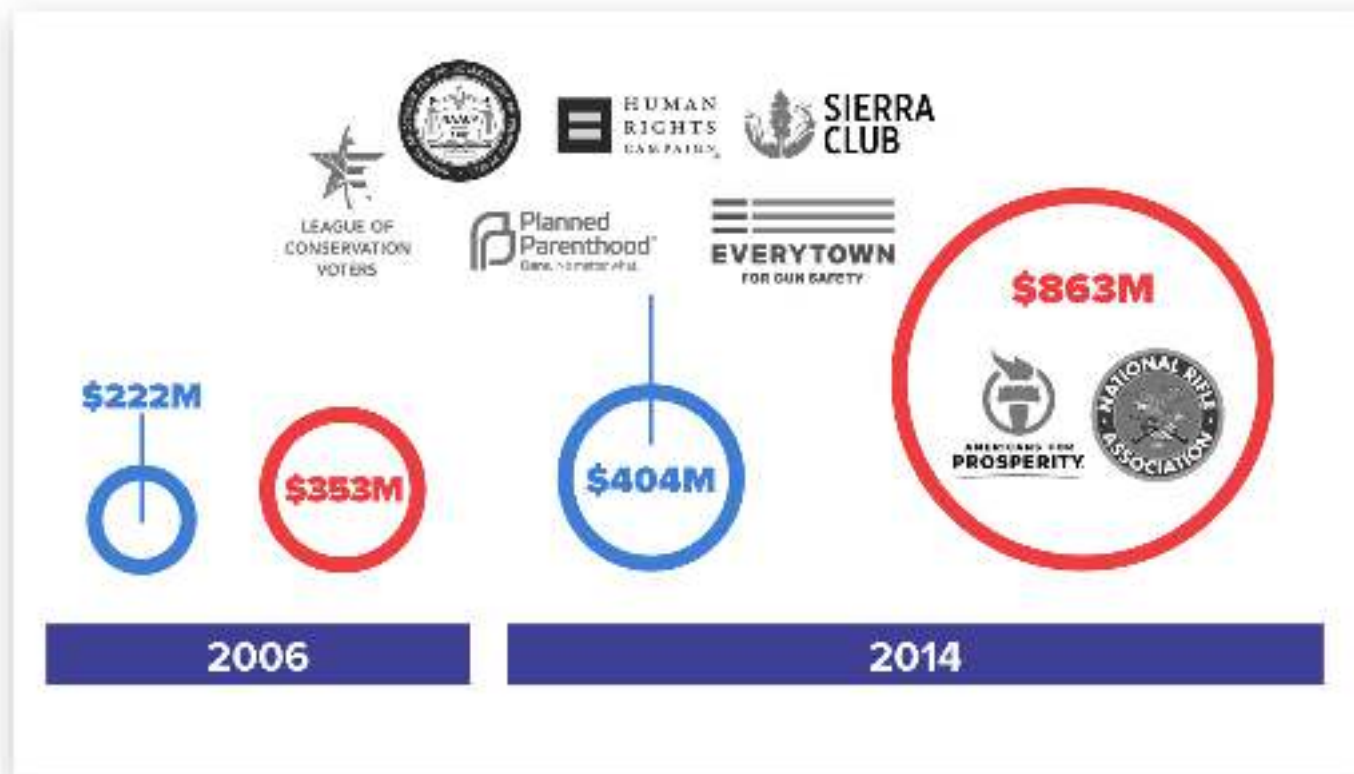
The 120 non-profit groups in the study spent a total of \$1.25 billion in 2006 and \$2.25 billion in 2014. **Based on these findings, it is reliably estimated that these 120 groups spent in excess of \$4 billion to influence elections and policy in the 2015/2016 cycle.**



PARTISAN ALIGNMENT OF ACTIVIST NON-PROFIT GROUPS

In 2014, these 120 groups spent nearly \$1 billion on so called “non-partisan” (501c3) activities – e.g., voter registration and issue/constituency focused (as opposed to candidate focused) organizing and get out the vote.

However, conservative-right organizations spent more than twice as much on “partisan” (501c4 and 501c6) programs which directly supported or opposed candidates. And, because far fewer conservative-right groups than progressive groups spent this more partisan money, the conservative-right was able to target it more effectively.



PRIVATIZING POLITICAL INFLUENCE

The dramatic increase in non-party resources to influence both **federal and state elections** can be seen most clearly at the **state level**.

The states are where the **combination** of **both *independent expenditures*** (to oppose or support specific candidates), **and** spending by ***activist non-profit groups*** (to generally influence electoral politics) is rapidly exceeding expenditures by either political party.

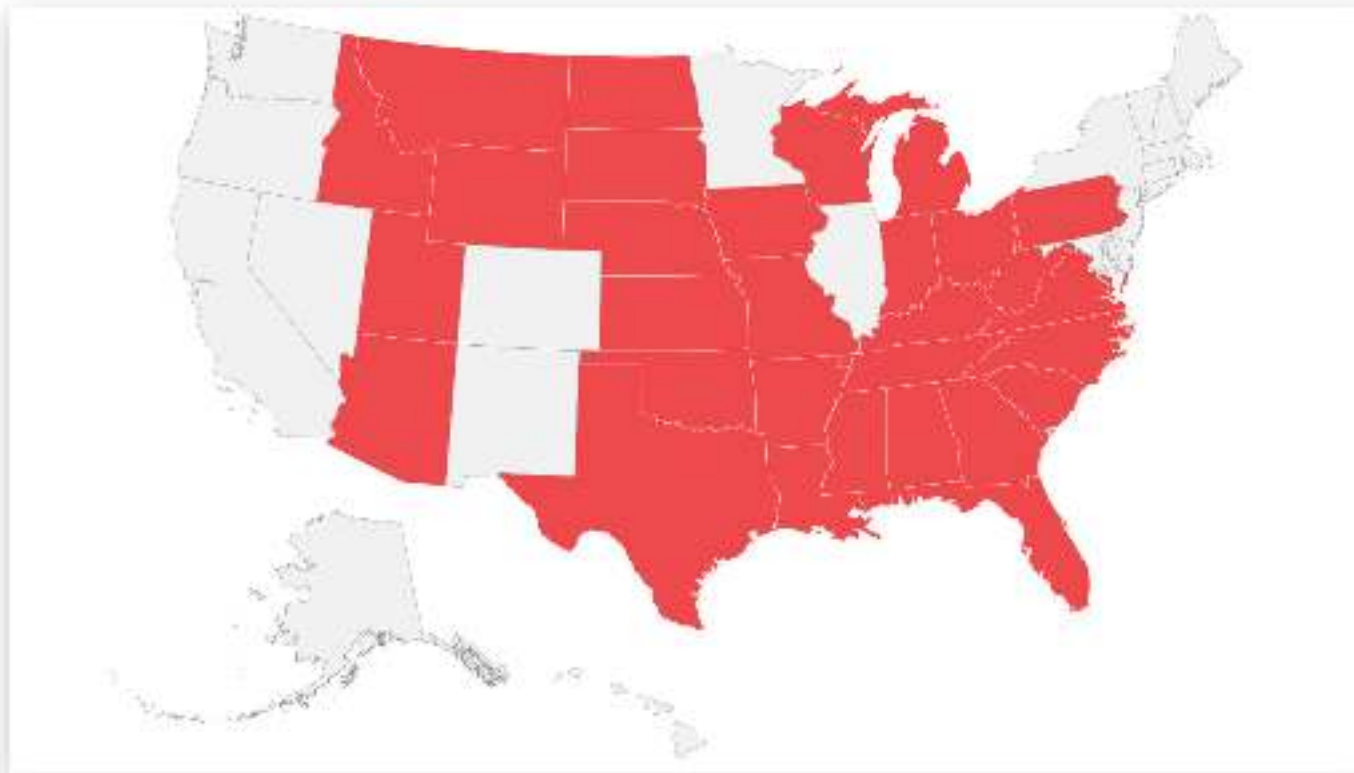


PRIVATIZING MULTI-STATE POLITICAL INFLUENCE
Focus on 30 Key States

THE REPUBLICAN-RIGHT'S MULTI-STATE POLITICAL FOCUS

The Citizens United decision, and the emergence of the Tea Party, in 2010 opened the floodgates of unlimited private funds to influence elections. These two events sparked an unprecedented private investment in machinery designed and operated to optimize alignment and effectiveness of the Republican-Right's state-based political assets.

Today, this machine controls the electoral and policy agendas in these 30 states, which, except for Virginia, are all states that Donald Trump won in 2016.



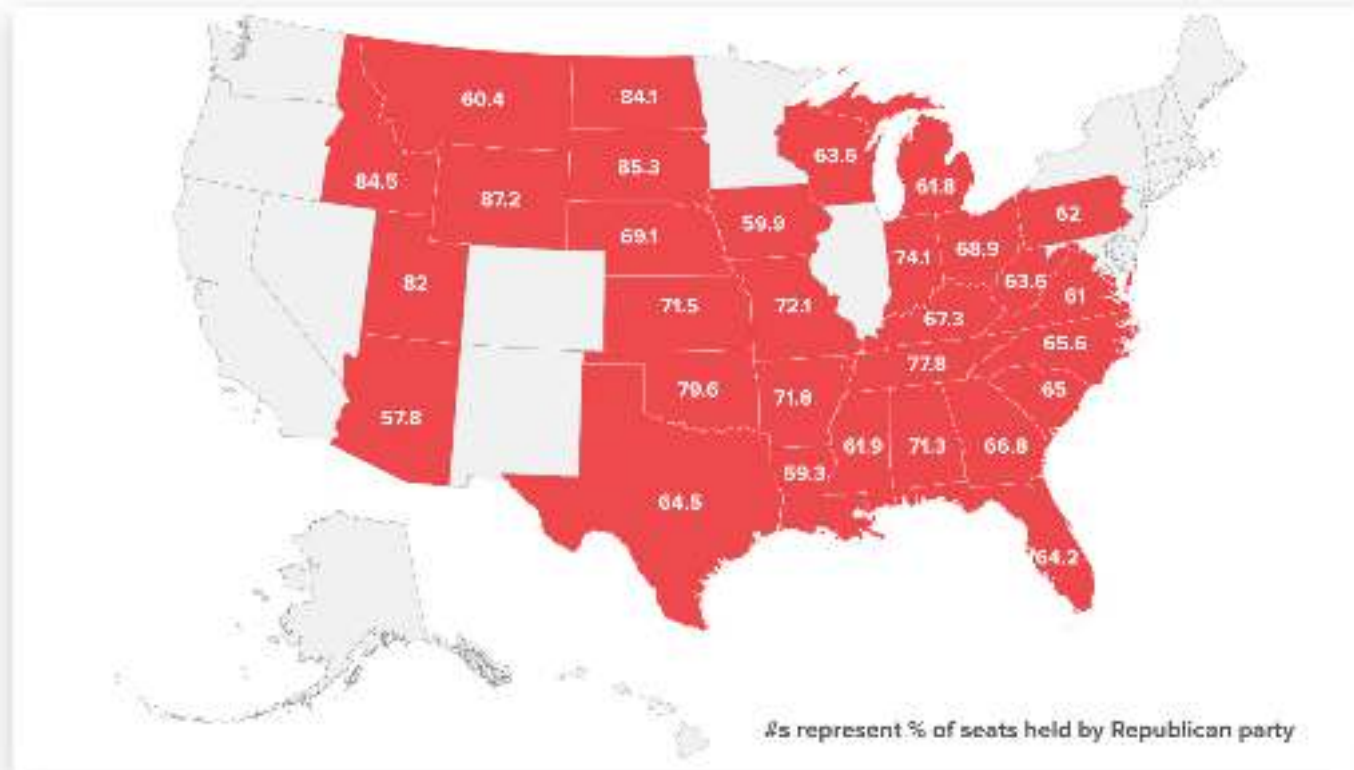
THE IRON CURTAIN OF REPUBLICANISM

The Republican-right has dominant political power in 30 states. This map reflects the percentage of the total number of state legislators, Governors, US Senators and Members of Congress in these states who are Republican. How did this overwhelming dominance happen?

Re-districting after the 2010 elections, of course, created tremendous electoral advantages in many of these states. And this redistricting, itself, was a carefully orchestrated and highly effective Republican strategy.

However, re-districting alone cannot account for the Republican-Right's continuing electoral stranglehold in these 30 states.

This 30 state "Iron Curtain of Republicanism" owes its dominance to privately financed machinery operated by the Koch Brothers and their donor allies. While performing many of the functions of a party—data management and analytics, earned and paid media, opposition research, candidate recruitment and training, issue and constituency organizing and mobilizing, and etc.—this non-party, multi-state apparatus orchestrates the strategies and tactics necessary to effectively optimize the Republican vote and assure Republican electoral and policy dominance in these 30 states.



THE RIGHT'S NON-PROFIT, NON PARTY POLITICAL MACHINE

This **Koch-led multi-state political engine** was not constructed over-night, but arguably has become the most successful, and most powerful, political machine in American history. Components of this machinery began being built more than forty years ago.

The **State Policy Network** has more than 40 affiliated state policy centers, each with average annual budgets of \$1.3 million, in the 30 states. These centers promote anti-government, anti-regulation, anti-tax and a host of ultra conservative social and economic initiatives, including stand your ground, anti-union, anti-minimum wage, climate change denial, pro-gun and pro-life policies.

The American Legislative Exchange Council is the primary coordinator of conservative-right legislative policy work in nearly 40 states, including the 30 states noted above. **ALEC** works closely with State Policy Network affiliates on a wide range of legislative proposals.

The Federalist Society has offices in most of the 30 states and focuses on state and federal courts and appointment/election of state judges. It has supported the emergence of a heavily Republican judiciary in all of these states.

The Christian Right has an extensive network of politically active churches, pastors and congregants in these 30 states. David Lane, an organizer of evangelical pastors, the **American Family Association**, **Focus on the Family**, evangelical broadcasters and other activist religious groups in these states have organized a highly effective network to optimize voter mobilization of evangelical and born again Christians in most of these 30 states.

Conservative Talk Radio's top ten talk radio hosts—Rush Limbaugh, Sean Hannity, Bill O'Reilly, Laura Ingram and etc. - are carried on nearly 2000 radio stations in these 30 states.

Activist Conservative Right Groups such as the National Rifle Association, the National Association of Independent Business Owners and Veterans Club, as well as, State Republican parties, National Republican **Independent Expenditure** Groups, the Club for Growth, and others also are present in each of these states.

Prior to 2010, these were essentially siloed resources that were neither strategic nor well aligned.

That changed in 2010. The Koch Brothers, and their vast network of allied donors, realized the critical need for alignment of their disparate political assets in each state. At the time, they strengthened two entities:

- **Americans for Prosperity (AFP)**, the Koch owned and operated “state management hub” with offices in virtually all of these states; and
- **Freedom Partners Chamber of Commerce**—the Koch-led “investment bank” that helps to fund AFP, and channels money into the groups that work closely with AFP, including the one's listed herein.

The AFP state management hubs assure effective alignment among the Republican-right party, candidate, IE and non-profit groups.

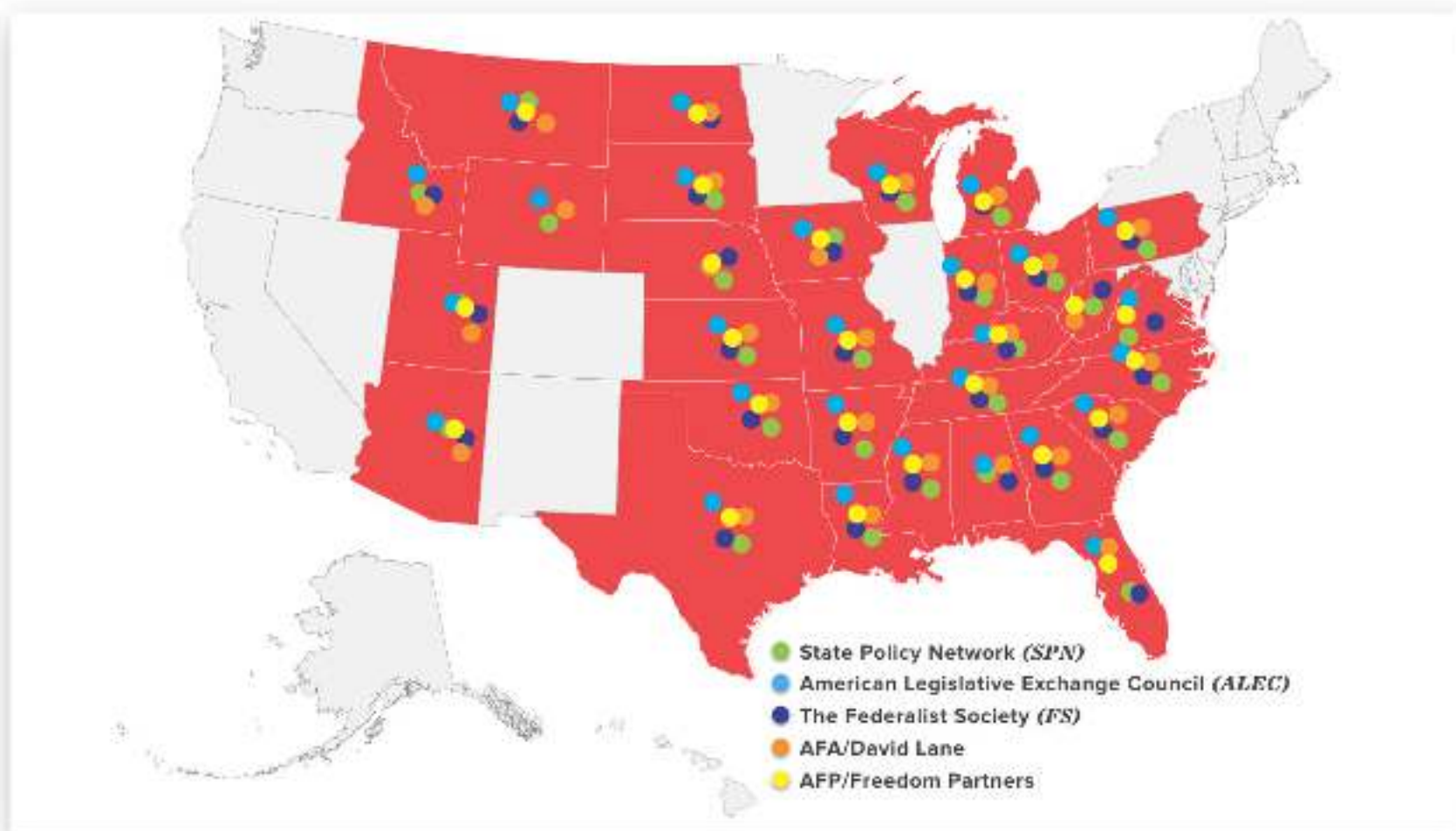
They assure coherence, consistency, optimal turnout, and electoral/legislative success.

Both **Americans for Prosperity** and **Freedom Partners** have boards of 8-10 people, comprised primarily of Koch Industry employees, former employees, and Koch financed political groups.

In 2013/2104, these two organizations alone reported spending and allocating **in excess of \$220 million**, virtually all of it in these 30 states.

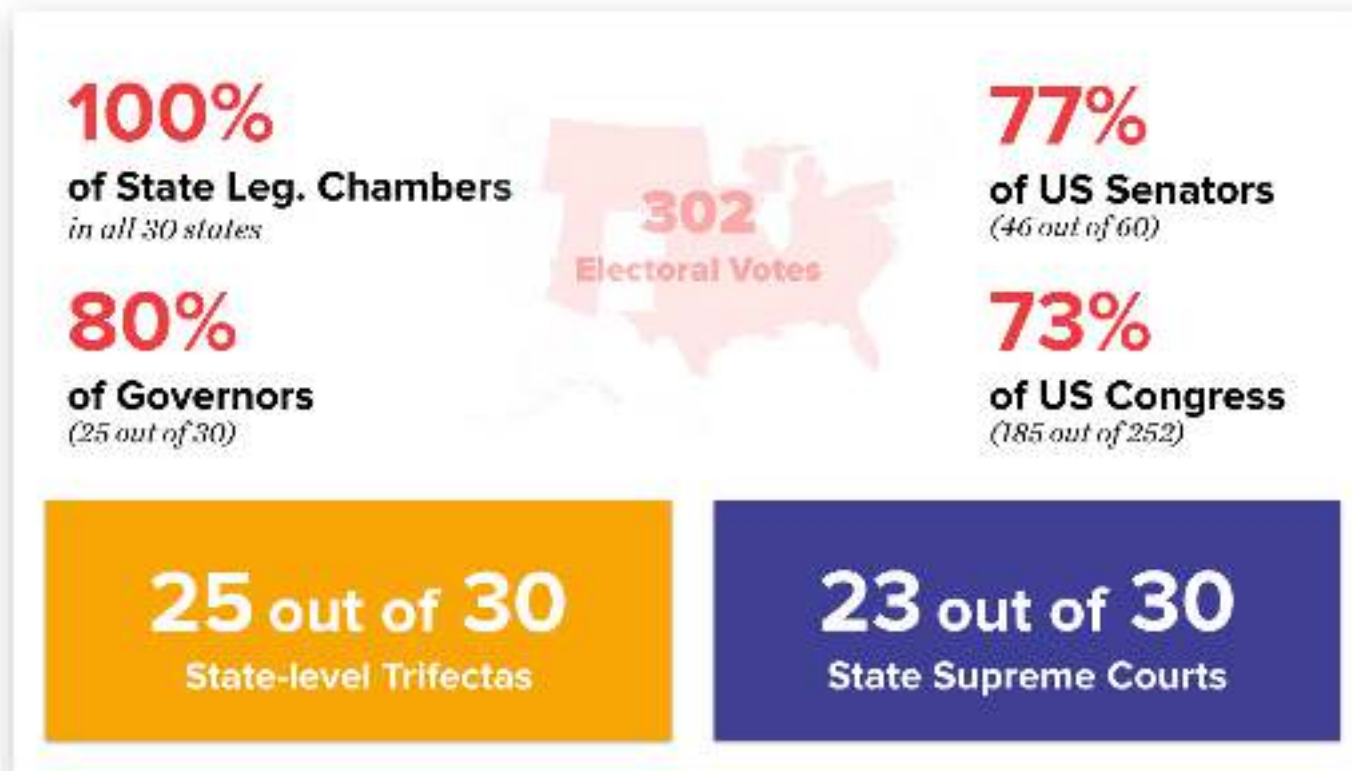
In addition, they effectively helped to align **hundreds of millions more** of Party, Candidate, non-profit and IE spending.

THE RIGHT'S NON-PROFIT, NON PARTY POLITICAL MACHINE



THE REPUBLICAN-RIGHT'S STATE AND NATIONAL POLITICAL DOMINANCE

There has been an astounding, powerful political impact of the Republican-right's extraordinary, non-party, privately financed and well managed state-based political machine. Never in the history of American politics have so few mobilized so effectively to dominate so many state governments and the political destiny of our nation.



MULTI-STATE POLITICAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

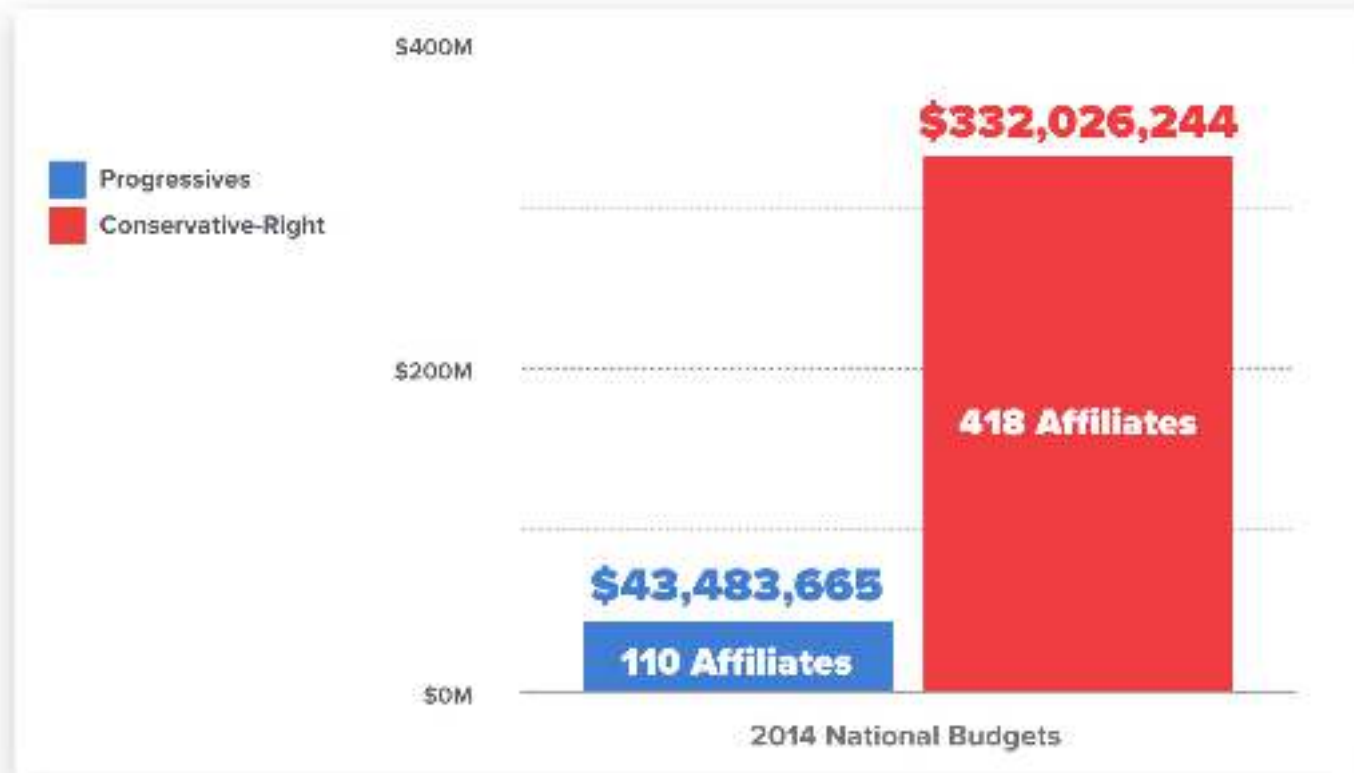
The Republican-right spends at least seven times more on the management and coordination of political activity within the 30 Republican Iron Curtain States.

In these states, the Koch-led **Americans for Prosperity** and **Freedom Partners**, provide data analytics, strategic planning and core financing for a state-based management system that includes **State Policy Network** affiliates, the **American Legislative Exchange Council** and others that collectively assure optimal alignment of dozens of conservative-right non-profits, independent expenditure groups, candidates and party efforts.

Progressives also have begun to develop more effective state political management systems—e.g., **AmericaVotes**, **State Voices**, **Project Now**, **State Innovation Exchange**, **State Priorities Partners** and others—to better align their political activity.

The chart below graphs numbers for one calendar year, 2014. Based on this data, it appears that the Republican-right likely spent \$750 million or more on strategic management and alignment in these 30 states in the 2015/2016 election cycle, versus approximately \$90 million to \$100 million spent by progressives.

It is important to note that this roughly 7 to 1 Republican-right spending advantage on management systems—data analytics, opposition research, candidate recruitment and training, earned and paid media hubs to assure message coherence, constituency organizing and voter mobilization strategies—assures the efficient and cost effective alignment of dozens of issue and constituency focused non-profit and independent expenditure groups, and party and candidate organizations.



APPENDIX A: ACTIVIST CONSERVATIVE-RIGHT ORGANIZATIONS

(included in the Study Highlighted on pages 13-16)

60 Plus Association	Faith and Freedom Coalition	National Federation of Independent Business
American Action Network & Forum	Family Research Council	National Organization for Marriage
American Conservative Union	Federalist Society	National Pro-Life Alliance
American Energy Alliance/Institute for Energy Research	Federation for American Immigration Reform	National Rifle Association
American Enterprise Institute	Fidelis/Fidelis Foundation/Catholic Vote	National Right to Life Committee
American Family Association	Focus on the Family	National Right to Work
American Future Fund	FreedomWorks	Pacific Research Institute
American Legislative Exchange Council	Goldwater Institute	Reason Foundation
Americans for Prosperity	Gun Owners of America	State Policy Network
Americans for Tax Reform	Heartland Institute	Susan B. Anthony List
Americans United for Life	Heritage Foundation & Heritage Action	Tax Foundation
Atlas Network	Hudson Institute	Tea Party Patriots 2013
Cato Institute	Independent Institute	Traditional Values Coalition
Center for Shared Services	Institute for Humane Studies	Witherspoon Institute
Center for the Study of Popular Culture (David Horowitz Freedom Center)	Intercollegiate Studies Institute	Freedom Partners
Club for Growth	Leadership Institute	Young America's Foundation
Competitive Enterprise Institute	Libre Trust	
Concerned Women for America	Ludwig von Mises Institute	
Conservative Caucus/Americans for Constitutional Liberty	Manhattan Institute	
Council for National Policy	Media Research Center	
Ethics and Public Policy Center	Mercatus Center	
	National Center for Policy Analysis	
	National Center for Public Policy Research	

APPENDIX A: ACTIVIST PROGRESSIVE ORGANIZATIONS

(included in the Study Highlighted on pages 13-16)

Advancement Project	Human Rights Campaign	Progress Now
Alliance for Justice	Institute for Policy Studies	Project Vote
America Votes	Institute for Women's Policy Research	Public Citizen
American Constitution Society	Issue One	ROC United
Americans for Tax Reform	Jobs with Justice	Rock the Vote
Americans United For Change	Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies	Sierra Club
Brave New Films	Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law	State Voices
Brennan Center for Justice	League of Conservation Voters	The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force
Center for American Progress	Media Matters for America	The Roosevelt Institute
Center for Community Change	Mi Familia Vota	Third Way
Center for Law and Social Policy	MomsRising	Voter Participation Center
Center for Popular Democracy	MoveOn Org Civic Action	Wellstone
Center for Responsible Lending	NAACP	Working America Education Fund
Center for Social Inclusion	NARAL Pro-Choice America	Working Families Party
Center on Budget and Policy Priorities	National Domestic Workers Alliance	
Citizen Engagement Lab	National Employment Law Project	
Color of Change	National Organization for Women	
Common Cause	NextGen Climate Action	
Democracy Now	Organizing for Action	
Demos	Partnership for Working Families	
Economic Policy Institute	People for the American Way	
Every Voice	PICO National Network	
Everytown for Gun Safety	Planned Parenthood	

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A CALL TO ACTION

a speech by

GARA LAMARCHE

originally delivered at

DONOR SUMMIT ON THE STATES

Washington, D.C. • March 23, 2017

DEMOCRACY IN THE BALANCE:

A Time to Resist and Restore

Confronting the Right's Assaults on Democracy Creating A Progressive Future for All Americans

“ *Business must learn the lesson...that political power is necessary; that such power must be assiduously cultivated; and that when necessary, it must be used aggressively and with determination—without embarrassment and without the reluctance which has been so characteristic of American business.*

The overriding first need is for businessmen to recognize that the ultimate issue may be survival—survival of what we call the free enterprise system, and all that this means for the strength and prosperity of America and the freedom of our people.”

This quote is from the often-referred to but rarely read “Powell Memo” – the 1971 document by future Supreme Court Justice Lewis Powell which issued a clarion call to conservatives about perceived threats to the free enterprise system, and sketched out a plan for dealing with them.

By the scale and scope of what the Koch Brothers and their allies have done in recent years, documented by Jane Mayer, Theda Skocpol, Rob Stein and others, the Powell plan seems almost quaintly modest today. But it launched a right-wing revolution that came to fruition in the Reagan and Bush eras, making such gains in political and social life that the Democracy Alliance was launched in 2005 -- not with a memo but with perhaps the most persuasive PowerPoint of the last few decades.

The aligned work of progressive donors has had much impact – in a stronger network of organizations, greatly bolstered capacities, and, most important, in the everyday lives of Americans. The urgency of this moment, however, compels us to do far more.

Some of our accomplishments to date will prove difficult for the right to unravel, like the Affordable Care Act and marriage equality. But from the high point of the 2008 election, we also have suffered heavy losses, and now we confront much more than a temporary advantage for one political party and ideology. As Powell believed that the free enterprise system was under assault, we now confront even deeper threats to the entire democratic system.

These threats are the result of a perfect storm of events:

- **The Citizens United decision unleashed a torrent of “dark money” spending in elections that has turbocharged corporate power and overwhelmed progressive governance in at least 30 states.** The syndicate assembled by the Koch brothers and their allies—a private political machine—is virtually unprecedented in American political life and unmatched by what progressive donors and activists have been able to do—so far.

- **Republican Governors and legislators have used their dominance in many states to attack sources of progressive strength**, breaking unions and investigating and defunding Planned Parenthood—while starving public higher and pre-K education, and rolling back rights for women, minorities and LGBT people.
- **The same extreme right-wing forces have restricted access to voting in state after state through draconian voter identification laws**, sharply reducing the number of polling places, and rolling back progressive measures like same-day registration and mail voting.
- **Right-wing control in a majority of states has been exploited to draw congressional and state legislative district lines** that perpetuate minority voting power to lock in a distorted majority in the U.S. House of Representatives and shut progressives out of meaningful presence in state houses.
- **The Supreme Court has struck a damaging blow to the Voting Rights Act**, removing a key tool for protection of ballot access for communities of color.
- **Immigrants**—a key source of American strength in a nation founded on a set of ideals, not race or national origin—**are under sustained attack** from both restrictive laws and executive orders and vigilante violence.
- An activist so-called “**conservative legal movement**” has politicized the courts and eroded enduring constitutional values of equality, liberty, justice and the rule of law. Having successfully held a Supreme Court seat hostage, the right now may well have the majority they need to reverse *Roe v. Wade* and undo a host of other progressive constitutional gains.
- At the same time, the right is using its power to **deregulate banks and exploit financial markets** in order to consolidate wealth in the hands of a privileged few, fueled by years of giveaways to banks and corporations, accompanied by decades of underinvestment in public goods and services.
- We now have a President, with the most extreme **anti-government White House staff and Cabinet in generations, determined to advance this agenda at the federal level and undermine democratic norms from freedom of the press to the independence of the judiciary**. But make no mistake, Donald Trump is the culmination of these trends, not the cause of them. The agenda his administration and his congressional allies are pushing has been waiting for this moment for a generation.

These assaults on democratic processes and systems hurt working families, endanger our environment and public health, erode faith and trust in government, delegitimize democratic institutions, and undermine the capacity of government at all levels to deliver basic services. Targeted and perniciously racialized, the rights’ assaults on democracy harm all Americans, but have a profoundly disproportionate impact on communities of color.

This alarming erosion of democracy has not been accidental. It is the result of a long-term, tenacious strategy by the right. It has taken systemic root, and has affected culture, discourse and law, and it will not be reversed overnight.

We have much to resist. But building a progressive American future is not merely a matter of undoing the considerable damage that the Right is imposing.

It requires a generation of restoration fueled by an understanding of why we have lost so much ground in the last eight years. How have we lurched in eight short years from the barrier-breaking promise of Barack Obama to the dystopian world of Donald Trump?

In many ways, our predicament is a failure of our imagination—our inability to see clearly the true nature and scope of the dire threats posed by the right and its seemingly unlimited capacities to govern with mendacity.

But this moment requires more than imagination, structure and strategy. And it requires more than sustained resistance to the Right’s destructive and divisive policies.

Our most critical challenge is to offer a clear and compelling progressive vision for America. A vision founded in freedom and justice, that inspires aspirations across the disparate geographic and demographic sections of our country. A vision grounded in economic opportunity, economic security and economic fairness for all.

Progressives cannot reclaim the mantle of leadership until we can give voice to the palpable and widespread economic insecurities felt throughout America. False promises have drawn some voters, for now, to a fraud like Donald Trump. But they were effective in the first place because of our failure to connect, and when the promises prove empty, voters will not turn to us unless they believe we can deliver.

We don't have all the answers, but we must at least ask the right questions:

- What is the future of work in a world of technological advance and global connection?
- What government policies and public and private investments will create more, better paying jobs for a broad cross-section of Americans?
- What can be achieved in a society liberated and enriched by the diverse talents and energies of all?
- What does democracy look like where maximum participation is the goal, where running for office is not conditioned on access to wealth, and where new leadership transforms all levels of government?
- How can we imagine a media with access for all communities and points of view, where truth is a paramount value, and trust in science and facts is restored?
- How can we rebuild a judicial system above the partisan fray, but fiercely grounded in a constitutional vision of freedom, equal opportunity and justice for all?
- What does it look like to have education and healthcare systems that are accessible and affordable for all, drawing on transformative innovation and technology?
- What foreign policies acknowledge this century's existential challenges—from climate change to human rights to the threats of terrorism and nuclear proliferation—and accept both the value of American leadership and the exigencies of global interdependence?

In asking these questions, and in offering our best answers to American voters, we must lean into our differences—and we know we have them—on issues like trade and financial reform, education and foreign policy. In our big tent, we also have our differences on how change happens. I believe social movements are central to that. Others focus primarily on elections. Too few of us are developing strategies to achieve sustainable change by assuring that social movements and elections are interrelated and interdependent. Debating these issues civilly and robustly, while sticking together as progressives, is not a sign of weakness, but a source of strength.

Meanwhile the landscape we confront as a result of last November 8th has done much to unite us, helping us to begin clarifying what we stand for—and against.

Grassroots activism has been rocketing since the shock of last November. I know mine has. I didn't work for 40 years for human and civil rights and economic justice to see it destroyed just as my children's generation is coming to leadership, with my grandson not far behind. So many of us have found ourselves wanting to do more. Not just knock on doors, but march with millions to protect women's rights. Not just write a check, but show up at the airport to stand against travel bans and deportations. There is no limit to what an aroused citizenry can do, and the energy and passion are with us.

We are facing the crisis that we do because our opponents have been highly disciplined and organized. The progressive cause in this moment requires us to do the same. We need to be long-term, strategic, well-financed and well-aligned, act at the local, state and national levels simultaneously and in sync, resolute in each forum in which power is contested: redistricting, legislative action, electoral work, leadership development.

We don't have donors now at the scale of the Koch Brothers, and certainly not the corporate self-interest that animates their investments. But progressives have people. And when we align our organizations, create common visions and shared plans informed by our rich diversity, generate the funds necessary to win and commit with the same long view that our adversaries have excelled at, we overcome the siloed thinking and short-termism that too often has limited our vision and stifled our effectiveness.

We must continue to resist the Trump agenda, and that of his allies in Congress and the states, with all the energy and passion we can muster. These are the fights of our lives, and we must stand up as never before. For basic democratic norms like independent courts, a free press and voting rights. For communities under attack, like immigrants, refugees, poor women and transgender youth. For the social safety net, from health care to Meals on Wheels. And yes, for those left behind by shuttered factories and mines, by farmland speculation and urban gentrification, who are about to be betrayed by cynical election-year promises. We are defined by these fights. They are not simply about policies or programs, but about human dignity and the essential character of our country. In some of these fights, we will find common ground with principled conservatives, and we should not shirk from alliances that transcend ordinary political and ideological differences.

It is vital that our opposition and confrontation be channeled to the electoral realm, for we can all agree that replacement is the ultimate form of resistance. We must take the fight to the states, and put our dollars where they are most

needed. To paint the future in places where we have some power, like Oregon, Washington, Colorado, Minnesota, and California, so that when we win back power in other places there is a roadmap for a better America. To keep and expand our gains in Pennsylvania, Virginia, New Mexico and North Carolina. To take back Ohio and Michigan and Florida and Wisconsin. To keep our eyes on the prizes of Arizona, Georgia and Texas, and down the line, southern states with now un-registered Black and Immigrant voters, and prairie and western states where proud progressive populist traditions can be reawakened.

We need to respect data and analytical models, to be sure—they remain critical tools. But analytics alone, cut off from what organizers on the ground are hearing on front stoops and on factory floors, will not win the day. We need to be in the field all across this country—and not just before elections—in communities of color which have been the steadiest supporters of progressive causes but have too often seen resources come too little too late, and also outside cities in many states where progressives have not maintained the enduring relationships that create meaningful political bonds.

We need to take a page from the right and invest systematically in leadership development. We can't take back power in this country, no matter how good our ideas and strategies if there is only a trickle of new leaders in our pipeline.

We need to invest not only in elections, but in year-in year-out policy work – supporting groups like the State Innovation Exchange and the EARN and State Priorities Partnership networks.

We need to empower more organizers with deep roots in both urban and rural communities.

And we need to support innovation and new ideas, bringing creative solutions incubated in states to national prominence and offering fresh solutions which may challenge established orthodoxies, because no movement ever came to power and kept it without doing that – certainly not the right, which has set the policy table in this country for over forty years.

As Lyndon Johnson famously put it, we need to walk and chew gum at the same time. Not every one of us can do every one of these things—the Democracy Alliance, for its part, will focus on winning in the states and supporting core democratic norms and institutions in the period ahead—but all of it must be done, and we have to work together to make this progressive ecosystem flourish, because like the natural environment, it is interdependent.

I got out of the Washington Metro one recent morning, and as I was ascending the escalator, I heard the stunningly beautiful voice of a soloist singing Beethoven's Ode to Joy. She turned out to be a young Black woman, with a basket in front of her as she sang. I pulled out a dollar and put it in, grateful almost to tears for this moment of morning grace. As I walked away with her voice fading in the distance, I thought to myself: I want to live in a country where the abounding and rich diversity of musical and artistic talent is supported by my government, not one where already paltry arts funding is eliminated so that Trump, Ryan and McConnell can give more tax cuts to the rich. I want to live in a country where my 88-year old aunt, a retired nun living alone in senior public housing, can keep getting the nourishment and the human connection that Meals on Wheels gives her each day. I want to live in a country where my grandson and his classmates in their largely Black and Latino public school in Brooklyn can keep learning chess—so that I continue to be beaten in six moves by a five-year old—and not see precious public dollars for these children who are our future drained away by voucher programs.

These are not just political battles. They are moral imperatives. They are not only about what laws are passed, who is in power, who gets money. They are about who we are.

Let's do more than resist the worst attacks on us, though we must resist them mightily. We need safety nets, but we need ladders more. I want to build a country where we celebrate investments in all aspects of our common humanity, and lift us higher, not one where we just fight to save scraps of the Constitution and the social compact, constrained by a narrow vision.

It is no overstatement to say that the direction of our country for decades to come—and whether our country will be recognizable to our children—will be set by the political outcomes of the next two election cycles.

Democracy is in the balance.

Let's think big.

And let's get to work.

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