Mapping Conservative Interests in Charter Schools

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In the book *Who Rules America?*, sociologist William Domhoff argues that the corporate community uses its immense economic power to shape policy making through its control of a “policy planning network.” Briefly, Domhoff claims that corporations use their wealth to fund conservative-minded think tanks which in turn produce studies that support and legitimize the interests of the corporate community, seeing as these studies influence state policy (Domhoff, 74). Members of the corporate community allegedly involve themselves in the policy planning network in four basic ways: “first, they finance the organizations… Second, they provide a variety of free services… Third, they serve as trustees… Finally, they take part in the daily activities of some of the groups in the network or send their assistants to keep them abreast on new developments” (Domhoff 74). This paper follows the flow of money between conservative foundations and think tanks to demonstrate how the corporate community has involved itself in the charter school movement. Corporations tend to support charter schools because they have been identified as profitable investments, but also because they work against the interests of teachers unions. I attempted to map this policy planning network by examining the Center for Education Reform and other think-tanks that support charter schools. Utilization of the Conservative Transparency Database helped reveal what kind of foundations are supporting these think tanks, and ultimately, helped paint a picture of “the policy planning network.”

Methodology:

When compiling my list of donor foundations, I chose the top six unique contributors to each think tank. Thus, if a contributor appeared in the top six more than once, it was not added to the list twice. It is important to note that all of the donor foundations are known to have conservative interests or backgrounds. When compiling my list of think tanks, I referred to those listed on the Center for Education Reform website. When I calculated the funds donated by each foundation, I totaled all donations the foundation had made to all of the think tanks on my list, starting with the year 2010 and including everything up to September 2014.

Think Tanks Examined:

Center for Education Reform **(C.E.R)**

Reason Foundation **(REASON)**

Illinois Policy Institute **(IL. POL.)**

Goldwater Institute **(GOLD)**

John Locke Foundation **(LOCKE)**

State Policy Network **(ST. POL)**

American Legislative Exchange Council **(A.L.E.C)**

Donor Foundations Examined:

|  |
| --- |
| Walton Family Foundation **(WALTON)** |
| Jaquelin Hume Foundation **(HUME)** |
| The Lynd and Harry Bradley Foundation **(BRADLEY)** |
| The Challenge Foundation **(CHALNGE)** |
| DonorsTrust **(D.T)** |
| Lovett and Ruth Peters Foundation **(PETERS)** |
| Dunn's Foundation for the Advancement of Right Thinking **(DUNN)** |
| Searle Freedom Institute **(SEARLE)** |
| Claws Foundation **(CLAWS)** |
| Sarah Scaife Foundation **(SCAIFE)** |
| Donors Capital Fund **(D.C.F)** |
| Mercer Family Foundation **(MERCER)** |
| American Action Network **(A.A.N)** |
| Barney Family Foundation **(BARNEY)** |
| Ed Uihlein Family Foundation **(UIHLEIN)** |
| State Policy Network **(ST. POL)** |
| John Dawson Foundation **(DAWSON)** |
| Reams Foundation **(REAMS)** |
| John William Pope Foundation **(POPE)** |
| The Roe Foundation **(ROE)** |
| Chase Foundation of Virginia **(CHASE)** |
| Charles G. Koch Charitable Foundation **(KOCH)** |
| The Thirteen Foundation (**THIRTEEN)** |
| Claude R. Lambe Charitable Foundation **(LAMBE)** |
| PhRMA **(PhRMA)** |
| Exxon Mobil **(EXXON)** |

Table 1

Table one looks at which foundations donated to which think tanks, and identifies any foundations that donated to more than one of the think tanks on my list. Interestingly, many foundations donated to more than one think tank that I chose to examine in this study. This table also provides data for the amount of money each foundation donated to each individual think tank.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **C.E.R** | **REASON** | **HEART** | **IL. POL.** | **GOLD** | **LOCKE** | **ST. POL.** | **A.L.E.C** |
| **WALTON** | **1,448,935** |  |  |  | **250,000** |  |  |  |
| **HUME** | **400,000** |  |  |  |  | **50,000** | **275,000** | **150,000** |
| **BRADLEY** | **175,000** |  | **250,000** |  |  |  |  | **170,000** |
| **CHALNGE** | **100,000** |  |  |  | **300,000** |  |  |  |
| **D.T** | **90,000** | **688550** |  | **607,707** |  |  | **1,004,850** |  |
| **PETERS** | **75,000** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **DUNN** |  | **4,485,000** | **780,000** | **190,000** |  |  |  |  |
| **SEARLE** |  | **2,685,500** |  |  |  |  | **1,382,500** | **300,000** |
| **CLAWS** |  | **550,000** |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **SCAIFE** |  | **400,000** |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **D.C.F** |  | **353,629** | **3,643,150** | **523,000** | **761,000** | **287,500** | **6,651,617** |  |
| **MERCER** |  |  | **1,726,000** | **600,000** | **350,000** |  |  |  |
| **A.A.N** |  |  | **300,000** |  |  |  |  |  |
| **BARNEY** |  |  | **125,000** |  |  |  |  |  |
| **UIHLEIN** |  |  |  | **2,300,000** |  |  |  |  |
| **ST. POL** |  |  |  | **247,000** |  |  |  |  |
| **DAWSON** |  |  |  |  | **500,000** |  |  |  |
| **REAMS** |  |  |  |  | **280,000** |  |  |  |
| **POPE** |  |  |  |  |  | **10,458,032** |  |  |
| **ROE** |  |  |  |  |  | **40,000** | **272,000** |  |
| **CHASE** |  |  |  |  |  | **30,000** |  |  |
| **KOCH** |  |  |  |  |  | **25,000** |  |  |
| **THIRTEEN** |  |  |  |  |  |  | **1,526,125** |  |
| **LAMBE** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | **400,000** |
| **PhRMA** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | **356,075** |
| **EXXON** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | **209,500** |

Table 2

Table 2 lists the number of think tanks that received funds from each donor foundation. Particularly noticeable is that The Jaquelin Hume Foundation and DonorsTrust each donated to four of the eight think tanks examined in this study, while Donors Capital Fund donated to six out of eight. Overall, a little over one third (ten out of twenty-six) of all donors were among the top six contributors to at least two think tanks.

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| --- | --- |
| **DONOR NAME** | **# OF THINK TANKS DONATED TO** |
| Walton Family Foundation | 2 |
| Jaquelin Hume Foundation | 4 |
| The Lynd and Harry Bradley Foundation | 3 |
| The Challenge Foundation | 2 |
| DonorsTrust | 4 |
| Lovett and Ruth Peters Foundation | 1 |
| Dunn's Foundation for the Advancement of Right Thinking | 3 |
| Searle Freedom Institute | 3 |
| Claws Foundation | 1 |
| Sarah Scaife Foundation | 1 |
| Donors Capital Fund | 6 |
| Mercer Family Foundation | 3 |
| American Action Network | 1 |
| Barney Family Foundation | 1 |
| Ed Uihlein Family Foundation | 1 |
| State Policy Network | 1 |
| John Dawson Foundation | 1 |
| Reams Foundation | 1 |
| John William Pope Foundation | 1 |
| The Roe Foundation | 2 |
| Chase Foundation of Virginia | 1 |
| Charles G. Koch Charitable Foundation | 1 |
| The Thirteen Foundation | 1 |
| Claude R. Lambe Charitable Foundation | 1 |
| PhRMA | 1 |
| Exxon Mobil | 1 |

Table 2 in graph form:

Table 3

This table looks at the amount of money donated by each donor foundation, regardless of how many of the examined think tanks they were top contributors to. Dunn’s Foundation for the Advancement of Right Thinking, The John William Pope Foundation, and Donors Capital Fund were easily the top donators in terms of amount donated.

All donations appear relatively insignificant compared to the donations made by Dunn’s Foundation for the Advancement of Right Thinking, Donors Capital Fund, and of course, the John William Pope foundation. Looking into the background of these organizations, we find that they are strongly affiliated with the corporate community. Dunn’s Foundation is named for William A. Dunn, who not only owns a widely successful capital management firm in Florida, but is also on the board of directors of the Reason Foundation, one of the think tanks championed by the Charter School Movement that is examined in this study (SourceWatch.org). The John William Pope Foundation was also named for its founder. Mr. Pope, after opening a successful retail discount chain known as Variety Wholesalers, created this foundation in 1986. Since then, it has actively contributed to conservative public policy organizations, think tanks, and educational institutions. In the 2011-2012 fiscal year, the foundation made over 9.3 million dollars in grants. Donors Capital Fund, the other big contributor, is yet another well known conservative charitable foundation. Donors Capital Fund, founded in 1999, is a supporting organization associated with Donors Trust, another big money name on the list. These twin donor organizations are known for creating separate accounts for all individual donors, allowing the wealthy to remain hidden and anonymous when funding “sensitive or controversial issues” (sourcewatch.org).

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **DONOR NAME** | **TOTAL AMOUNT DONATED (USD)** |
| Walton Family Foundation | $1,698,935 |
| Jaquelin Hume Foundation | $875000 |
| The Lynd and Harry Bradley Foundation | $595,000 |
| The Challenge Foundation | $400,000 |
| DonorsTrust | $2,391,107 |
| Lovett and Ruth Peters Foundation | $75,000 |
| Dunn's Foundation for the Advancement of Right Thinking | $10,720,000 |
| Searle Freedom Institute | $4,368,000 |
| Claws Foundation | $550,000 |
| Sarah Scaife Foundation | $400,000 |
| Donors Capital Fund | $12,219,896 |
| Mercer Family Foundation | $2,676,000 |
| American Action Network | $300.000 |
| Barney Family Foundation | $125.000 |
| Ed Uihlein Family Foundation | $2,300,000 |
| State Policy Network | $247.000 |
| John Dawson Foundation | $500,000 |
| Reams Foundation | $280,000 |
| John William Pope Foundation | $10,458,032 |
| The Roe Foundation | $312,000 |
| Chase Foundation of Virginia | $300,000 |
| Charles G. Koch Charitable Foundation | $25,000 |
| The Thirteen Foundation | $1,526,125 |
| Claude R. Lambe Charitable Foundation | $400,000 |
| PhRMA | $356,075 |
| Exxon Mobil | $209.500 |

Table 3 in graph form:

Table 3.1

Because the contributions made by Dunn’s Foundation for the Advancement of Right Thinking, The John William Pope Foundation, and Donors Capital Fund were so extraordinarily high (far into the multimillions) I made a second graph that excludes them from the model, as to get a better picture of how the other donor foundations compare to each other.

Concluding remarks:

After looking at the data, it is clear that the research supports Domhoff’s ideas about the elite policy planning network. All of top contributors for the think tanks this study examined have significant connections to the corporate community. The corporate community is clearly interested funneling massive amounts of money into the charter school movement, and it does so just as Domhoff suggests: by funding think tanks that back charter schools.