

BACKGROUND: THE WASHINGTON POLICY CENTER'S EXTREME FAR-RIGHT AGENDA



WHO ARE THEY?

The Washington Policy Center (WPC), a member of the Koch brother-funded State Policy Network, is a Seattle-based far-right organization that has championed extremely harmful policies on a wide range of issues, especially those related to education and labor. With an innocuous-sounding name, they often portray themselves as a legitimate, non-partisan think tank, but in reality, they are the Washington policy arm for a national network of extremist far-right funders and organizations.¹ The WPC has multiple financial ties to groups involved in the white nationalism movement.^{2,3,4}

WHAT'S THEIR AGENDA?

WPC defends the interests of millionaires and billionaires in Washington State. They recruited some of the state's richest citizens in opposition to the excise tax on capital gains that would fund child care and early education across the state.⁵ They have also been a steadfast advocate for gutting public school funding and promoting education privatization, even hosting privatization champion and Trump appointee Betsy DeVos as a keynote speaker for their annual fundraising dinner.⁶

On labor issues, the WPC has actively worked to discredit policies proven to benefit employees by fighting against the unionization of day-care workers, opposing minimum wage laws, and arguing against paid family leave legislation.⁷ The WPC has also fought against anti-racism curriculum in public schools and against Covid safety measures issued by public health departments.⁹

¹ SPN Directory, accessed April 12, 2019; "State Policy Network," Conservative Transparency, accessed April 12, 2019; Ed Pilkington, "Rightwing alliance plots to 'defund and defang' American's unions," The Guardian, August 30, 2017; Mai Hoang, "Rally for \$15 minimum wage to be held at Yakima McDonald's," Yakima Herald-Republic, April 15, 2015; Jeff Rhodes, "\$15 Minimum Wage an Idea So Stupid Only Liberals Can Believe It," Freedom Foundation, April 10, 2014; Olivera Perkins, "Nearly 9,000 hospitalized for flu in Ohio: Many didn't have paid sick days (poll)," Cleveland Plain-Dealer, April 29, 2015; Maxford Nelsen, "Study refutes key argument against Right-to-Work," Freedom Foundation, December 8, 2017.

² Donors Trust 2020 IRS 990 Form, Center for Media and Democracy

³ Conservative Transparency, accessed April 27, 2022.

⁴ Sarah Jones, "This Obscure Foundation Helped Fund The Alt-Right," New York Magazine, February 18, 2020.

"WPC played important role in capital gains income tax being ruled unconstitutional," Washington Policy Center, accessed June 29, 2022

⁵ Liv Finne, "Education Reform Plan: 8 Practical Ways to Improve Public Schools," Washington Policy Center, August, 2012; Nicole Jennings, "Betsy DeVos' Bellevue visit on education reform draws hundreds of protesters," Redmond Reporter, October 17, 2017; Jody Lawrence-Turner, "Room to Shrink," Spokesman Review, October 18, 2014; Liv Finne, "McCleary ruling led to spike in education spending," Washington Policy Center, November 11, 2017; Liv Finne, "Finding: State budget increases show Washington's public schools are not underfunded," Washington Policy Center, February 2, 2018.

⁷ News Tribune, June 30, 2014; Quinn Russell Brown, "Five voices on raising the minimum wage," Daily Herald, January 31, 2014; Erin Shannon, "Right-to-work is right for Washington," Puget Sound Business Journal, June 26, 2015; Nicholas Deshais, "Spokane police, firefighter salaries outpace region's average wages," The Spokesman Review, August 15, 2013; Gary Crooks, "Smart Bombs: The Wages of Politics," The Spokesman Review, June 15, 2014; Kathie Durbin, "Day-Care Bill Passes House," Seattle Times, February 29, 2008; Erin Shannon, "Guest column: Washington's new paid family and medical leave law — legislation through coercion?" Tri-City Herald, July 18, 2017; Yakima Herald Republic, January 4, 2004; John Wasik, "How The GOP Tax Plan Scrooges Middle Class, Retired And Poor," Forbes, November 29, 2017; Hunter Blair, "CEOs agree: Corporate tax cuts won't trickle down," The Hill, December 3, 2017.

⁸ Liv Finne, "The 1619 Project: Sloppy scholarship and distorted history under consideration for Washington schools," Washington Policy Center, accessed May 19, 2021

⁹ Todd Myers, "When Covid 'Science' Is a Smokescreen," Wall Street Journal, May 27, 2020

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TIES TO WHITE NATIONALISM

One of WPC's funders, Donors Trust, also bankrolls the New Century Foundation, a business alias for American Renaissance, which is designated a white nationalist hate group by the Southern Law Poverty Law Center (SPLC).^{10 11} According to SPLC, the New Century Foundation is a "self-styled think tank that promotes pseudo-scientific studies and research that purport to show the inferiority of blacks to whites."¹²

Washington Policy Center also received money from another donor who funded dangerous hate speech, the Bellevue-based Rotella Foundation,¹³ a key funder of neo-Nazi Richard Spencer's National Policy Institute.¹⁴ Spencer helped organize the 2017 "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville which brought together white supremacists from across the country. The rally ended tragically with a deadly hit and run and a white supremacist convicted for the murder.¹⁵

HOW IS WPC INVOLVED WITH THE STATE POLICY NETWORK?

For the past few decades, the right wing has been on a mission aimed at destroying their opposition. At the state level, these regressive forces not only use the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) to implement radical legislation, they also cynically utilize a vast, connected web of 501(c)(3) organizations—known as the State Policy Network (SPN)—to support this strategy.¹⁶

These tax-exempt organizations, which legally are supposed to be non-partisan, are being used by the regressive Right as so called "think-tanks" to support and promote ALEC legislation at the statewide level. These organizations give the illusion to the public—and the media—that legislation rolled out by ALEC is legitimate. Additionally, behind the scenes, these SPN groups have admitted (both on video and in writing) that their goal is to defund the Left and to advance Republican causes and candidates. This is a complete and utter violation of the organization's 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status.¹⁷

There are more than 60 state affiliates of the SPN, two of which are based in Washington state: the so-called "Freedom" Foundation and the Washington Policy Center.

¹⁰ [Donors Trust 2020 IRS 990 Form](#), Center for Media and Democracy

¹¹ ["American Renaissance,"](#) Southern Poverty Law Center

¹² ["American Renaissance,"](#) Southern Poverty Law Center

¹³ Conservative Transparency, accessed April 27, 2022.

¹⁴ Sarah Jones, ["This Obscure Foundation Helped Fund The Alt-Right,"](#) New York Magazine, February 18, 2020.

¹⁵ Vanessa Romo, ["Charlottesville Jury Convicts 'Unite The Right' Protester Who Killed Woman,"](#) National Public Radio, December 7, 2018.

¹⁶ American Legislative Exchange Council – State Policy Network, accessed April 12, 2019; Libby Watson, ["The Right-Wing Billionaires Bankrolling the Supreme Court Case to Destroy America's Unions,"](#) Splinter News, February 21, 2018; Michael Pierce, ["The Racist Origins of Right to Work,"](#) Labor Notes, August 3, 2017; Celine McNicholas, Zane Mokhiber, and Marni von Wilpert, ["Janus and fair share fees,"](#) Economic Policy Institute, 2/21/2018.

¹⁷ Ed Pilkington, ["Rightwing alliance plots to 'defund and defang' American's unions,"](#) The Guardian, August 30, 2017.

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WHO RUNS WPC?

The WPC is run by fringe far-right political operatives and they work closely with the anti-union “Freedom” Foundation on a variety of state and local issues.¹⁸

Paul Guppy: Guppy is the Vice President for Research at WPC. His “research” lines up with talking points and policy priorities from the far-right. Advocating for the privatization of public jobs, he said school districts “could greatly lower their costs by focusing resources on academics and contracting out tasks such as maintenance and the handling of employee benefits.”¹⁹ He defended Washington State’s “Three Strikes” law, which was taking criticism for causing life sentences at a disproportionate rate to Black people, saying, ‘If a criminal is in jail, he can’t criminalize someone else.’²⁰

Jason Mercier: Mercier is the director of the Center for Government Reform. Under the guise of “good and transparent” government, the Center for Government Reform pushes an agenda that seems well-intentioned but really just seeks opportunities to advance their far-right agenda including education privatization²¹ and opposition to raising the minimum wage.²²

Liv Finne: Finne is the director of the Center for Education at the WPC. She is a longtime proponent of education privatization and opponent of collective bargaining rights for educators.²³ She is a strong supporter of the Trump administration’s Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, saying that DeVos was “one of the top policy leaders in the country.”²⁴ Finne has been a vocal opponent of anti-racism education in Washington State schools.²⁵

¹⁹ Washington Policy Center Staff, accessed January 12, 2022.

²⁰ In 2004, Paul Guppy, who worked At WPC, said school districts “Could Greatly Lower Their Costs By Focusing Resources On Academics And Contracting Out Tasks Such As Maintenance And The Handling Of Employee Benefits.” [Yakima Herald-Republic, 1/4/2004]

²¹ [The Associated Press State & Local Wire], 2/19/2002

²² Jason Mercier, Charter schools now law - Cinderella edition, Washington Policy Center April 4, 2016

²³ Mercier Shared An Op-Ed on Twitter From The Hill Arguing That Raising The Minimum Wage Accomplishes Nothing. “Raising the minimum wage doesn’t matter” [Twitter, @OlympiaWatch, 7/20/2016]

²⁴ Liv Finne, Why opponents of Education Savings Accounts are wrong, Washington Policy Center, March 13, 2017

²⁵ Liv Finne, Why we invited Betsy DeVos to speak on education reform, Washington Policy Center, September 8, 2017

²⁶ Liv Finne Twitter Post, July 28, 2021

FUNDERS: THE WASHINGTON POLICY CENTER



The WPC has been funded by a veritable who's who of national far-right foundations, most of which were created by millionaires and billionaires. Many have links to white supremacists, Islamophobes, anti-immigrant and anti-LGBT organizations. We've detailed some of their key funders.

Key Funders	
Donor	Amount
Murdock Charitable Trust	\$675,000
Donors Capital Fund	\$590,775
State Policy Network	\$134,832
The Roe Foundation	\$120,000
Jaquelin Hume Foundation	\$105,000
JM Foundation	\$90,000
John M. Olin Foundation	\$64,000
Robert P. Rotella Foundation	\$57,500
Castle Rock Foundation	\$40,000
National Christian Charitable Foundation	\$23,000
Searle Freedom Trust	\$15,000
PhRMA	\$10,500
Atlas Economic Research Foundation	\$6,100
Charles G. Koch Charitable Foundation	\$5,000
DonorsTrust	\$2,350

MURDOCK CHARITABLE TRUST. One of their most ardent local supporters over the years has been the Vancouver, WA-based Murdock Charitable Trust.²⁶ While funding a few good community organizations, Murdock inexplicably also funds extreme far-right causes like crisis pregnancy centers, organizations that support gay conversion therapy and a wide range of anti-LGBTQ, anti-choice and anti-worker organizations. This includes the Alliance Defending "Freedom" which the Southern Poverty Law Center has designated as an anti-LGBT hate group.²⁷

DONORS CAPITAL FUND. The WPC's Second-highest contributor, Donors Capital Fund, is connected to the infamous Charles and David Koch.²⁸ One of the key goals for Donors Capital Fund is to invalidate climate science. A Center for Media and Democracy report showed that Donors Capital and the related DonorsTrust were responsible for half of the donations to leading climate denial organizations.²⁹

²⁶ W American Bridge Conservative Transparency, accessed February 5, 2019; IRS Forms 990, Guidestar, Foundation Center, accessed February 5, 2019.

²⁷ The Murdock Charitable Trust, accessed April 12, 2019; Dan Petegorsky, "Murdock Trust raises eyebrows by funding Freedom Foundation," The Stand, March 18, 2016; Marcie Bianco, "One Woman Went Undercover to Expose the Lie of 'Crisis Pregnancy Centers,'" Mic.com, September 22, 2014; Murdock Charitable Trust, accessed October 6, 2015; Leila Forbes, Quinn Haaga, Rachel Grisham and Adam Fractor, "Amid worthy philanthropy, hate finds footing (Opinion)," Oregon Live, February 11, 2017; IRS via The National Center for Charitable Statistics, accessed September 14, 2015; Portland Fellowship- Counseling, accessed September 9, 2015; Portland Fellowship- About Us, accessed October 4, 2017; David Groves, "Murdock Trust urged to stop funding extremist groups," The Stand, November 24, 2015; Rachel Percelay, "How An Extreme Anti-LGBT Legal Powerhouse Is Working To Enact 'Religious Freedom' Laws," Media Matters, April 16, 2015; SPLC Anti-LGBT, accessed April 12, 2019; GLAAD- Ryan T. Anderson, accessed April 12, 2019; Murdock Charitable Trust, accessed September 14, 2015.

²⁸ American Bridge Conservative Transparency, accessed February 5, 2019; IRS Forms 990, Guidestar, Foundation Center, accessed February 5, 2019.

²⁹ Alex Kotch, The Dirty Dozen: The Biggest Nonprofit Funders of Climate Denial, The Center for Media and Democracy, March 21, 2022.

FUNDERS: THE WASHINGTON POLICY CENTER



STATE POLICY NETWORK (SPN): In addition to being a member of the SPN, they are also funded by them.³⁰ The SPN is a national network of far-right think tanks with member organizations in 49 states. One of the SPN's key funders is the Bradley Foundation—a **Wisconsin-based far-right donor organization with a \$850-million-dollar war chest.**³¹ The Bradley Foundation has also funded the work of Frank Gaffney, whom the Southern Poverty Law Center called “one of America’s most notorious Islamophobes.”³² The Bradley Foundation also funded the fellowship of Charles Murray, a social scientist who argued that success in America was based on genes.³³ The Southern Poverty Law Center has this to say about Murray: “[Murray] has become one of the most influential social scientists in America, using racist pseudoscience and misleading statistics to argue that social inequality is caused by the genetic inferiority of the black and Latino communities, women and the poor.”³⁴

ROE FOUNDATION. The WPC received substantial support from the Roe Foundation.³⁵ The Roe Foundation was created by Thomas Roe, a conservative activist who also formed the State Policy Network. Roe was a strong opponent of unions and as of 2007, his foundation’s annual gift to the Greenville, SC orchestra came with the stipulation that its musicians could not unionize.^{36 37}

SARAH SCAIFE FOUNDATION. Another high-level donor to the SPN is Pennsylvania’s Sarah Scaife foundation. In addition to giving money to the SPN, they have given to anti-immigrant and white supremacist organizations including:³⁸

- The Center for Immigration Studies whose leadership has ties to [white nationalism and racist groups](#).³⁹
- The Center for Equal Opportunity.⁴⁰ This group has actively [opposed the Voting Rights Act](#), which has recently been gutted by the Supreme Court and left millions of [people of color open to voting disenfranchisement](#).
- The Center for Security Policy which was founded by Franky Gaffney, “[one of America’s most notorious Islamophobes](#)”.⁴¹
- The Media Research Center⁴² which the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette [described](#) as the organization that poured the gas on public trust of the media.⁴³

³⁰ American Bridge Conservative Transparency, accessed February 5, 2019; IRS Forms 990, Guidestar, Foundation Center, accessed February 5, 2019.

³¹ Mayer, Jane (2021-08-02). “The Big Money Behind the Big Lie: Donald Trump’s attacks on democracy are being promoted by rich and powerful conservative groups that are determined to win at all costs”. Newyorker.com.

³² SPLC- Frank Gaffney, Jr., accessed April 12, 2019.

³³ Bradley Foundation, accessed October 4, 2017.

³⁴ SPLC- Charles Murray, accessed April 12, 2019

³⁵ American Bridge Conservative Transparency, accessed February 5, 2019; IRS Forms 990, Guidestar, Foundation Center, accessed February 5, 2019.

³⁶ John Miller, “Safeguarding the Conservative Donor’s Intent: The Roe Foundation at 39,” Foundation Watch, accessed May 26, 2015.

³⁷ SourceWatch- Roe Foundation, accessed April 12, 2019.

³⁸ Hatewatch Staff, ANTI-IMMIGRANT CENTER FOR IMMIGRATION STUDIES CONTINUES TO ASSOCIATE WITH WHITE NATIONALISTS, Southern Poverty Law Center, October 9, 2015.

³⁹ Conservative Transparency- Center for Immigration Studies, accessed April 12, 2019.

⁴⁰ Conservative Transparency- Center for Equal Opportunity, accessed April 12, 2019.

⁴¹ Conservative Transparency- Center for Security Policy, accessed April 12, 2019.

⁴² Conservative Transparency, accessed April 12, 2019.

⁴³ <http://www.paspotlight.org/2017/sarah-scaifes-secret-scary-scheme/>



FAR-RIGHT AGENDA IN DETAIL

LABOR AND WORKER'S RIGHTS

Against Competitive Salaries for Public Safety: In 2013, WPC released a study which said Spokane's police officers and firefighters were being paid higher than the region's average wages. "As budget discussions ramp up at the city of Spokane, a conservative think tank has released a study suggesting that pay for Spokane's police and firefighters has not only outpaced the region's average wages but is better than what their peers in larger Northwest cities are earning."⁴⁴

Against Workers Joining Unions: In 2008, The WPC wrote a position paper criticizing the American Federation of Teachers' unionization of day-care workers as "unnecessary because day-care programs already get ample federal and state subsidies."⁴⁵

Against Raising the Minimum Wage: Erin Shannon of the WPC said \$15 minimum wage laws were about politics and had "nothing to do with math, data, the economy or supply and demand."⁴⁶ In January 2014, Erin Shannon, also came out against raising the minimum wage.⁴⁷

Against Mandatory Paid Family Sick Leave: Erin Shannon said the WPC believed employee benefits are better when they are voluntarily given by companies.⁴⁸

For Privatizing Public Sector Jobs: In 2004, Washington Policy Center's Paul Guppy said school districts "could greatly lower their costs by focusing resources on academics and contracting out tasks such as maintenance and the handling of employee benefits."⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Nicholas Deshais, "Spokane police, firefighter salaries outpace region's average wages," The Spokesman Review, August 15, 2013

⁴⁵ Kathie Durbin, "Day-Care Bill Passes House," Seattle Times, February 29, 2008

⁴⁶ Gary Crooks, "Smart Bombs: The Wages of Politics," The Spokesman Review, June 15, 2014

⁴⁷ Quinn Russell Brown, "Five voices on raising the minimum wage," Daily Herald, January 31, 2014

⁴⁸ Erin Shannon, "Guest column: Washington's new paid family and medical leave law — legislation through coercion?" Tri-City Herald, July 18, 2017

⁴⁹ Yakima Herald Republic, January 4, 2004



FAR-RIGHT AGENDA IN DETAIL

EDUCATION

Against anti-racism curriculum: On April 18, 2021 WPC paid for a full-page advertisement in the Spokesman-Review imploring Gov. Inslee to not sign into law three bills that would establish ongoing training for public educators on cultural competency, diversity, equity and inclusion, claiming the training would “otherize” white people. In an Op-Ed in the same newspaper two weeks later, WPC staffer Chris Cargill called the bills “divisive and hateful.”⁵⁰ Liv Finne, The Education Director at WPC, wrote an article criticizing one anti-racism curriculum for not considering the historical context of American slavery because “forced labor was not exclusive to North America...”⁵¹

Against Funding Public Education: During a WPC fundraising dinner, keynote speaker Betsy DeVos said students should be “taken out of the public-school setting and given a charter school education.”⁵²

Against Reducing Class Size: Liv Finne opposed Initiative 1351, aimed at reducing class size, saying schools should instead “Focus on teaching.”⁵³

PUBLIC HEALTH

Against COVID-19 Safety Precautions: In May of 2020, Washington State was seeing an average of 245 new COVID-19 diagnoses per day. Until recently, it had the highest number of confirmed cases in the country. It was during this time that WPC’s Center for the Environment Director Todd Myers wrote an Op-Ed for the Wall Street Journal claiming Washington State health authorities, and Gov. Inslee, were deploying the term “science” as a weapon against political opponents and “a bluff,” in lieu of actual evidence to support new safety precautions in the state.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Chris Cargill, “Washington legislative session results devastating and divisive,” Spokesman-Review, April 30, 2021

⁵¹ Liv Finne, “The 1619 Project: Sloppy scholarship and distorted history under consideration for Washington schools,” Washington Policy Center, accessed May 19, 2021

⁵² Nicole Jennings, “Betsy DeVos’ Bellevue visit on education reform draws hundreds of protesters,” Redmond Reporter, October 17, 2017

⁵³ Jody Lawrence-Turner, “Room to Shrink,” Spokesman Review, October 18, 2014

⁵⁴ Todd Myers, “When Covid ‘Science’ Is a Smokescreen,” Wall Street Journal, May 27, 2020



FAR-RIGHT AGENDA IN DETAIL

Against Affordable Health Care: In July 2017, the Redmond Reporter wrote that the WPC was “opposed to single-payer health care.” Roger Stark, who worked as a health analyst for WPC, said that Americans would not like the trade-off associated with the program. Stark said, “Fundamentally, it’s a terrible idea.”⁵⁴ In 2011, Roger Stark, who worked at WPC, criticized Washington’s health insurance partnership (HIP), which helped small businesses and low-wage workers pay for medical coverage. “Stark argues that the state and federal government have ‘no business’ offering subsidies.”⁵⁵

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Against Equal Justice: In 2002, The Associated Press reported that Washington state’s “three strikes” law had “resulted in life sentences for blacks at a much higher rate than for whites.” The AP wrote, “Washington state’s ‘three-strikes’ law, intended to take violent repeat offenders off the streets, has resulted in life sentences for blacks at a much higher rate than for whites, according to a report from the state Sentencing Guidelines Commission.”⁵⁷ The WPC’s Paul Guppy said the tougher sentencing laws were helping decrease violent crime. The AP wrote, “‘We’re not saying it’s only ‘three strikes,’ but tougher sentencing has definitely helped,’ says Paul Guppy, research director of the Washington Policy Center, which generated a report that led to the three-strikes legislation.”⁵⁸

ENVIRONMENT

Against Environmental Protection Laws: Eric Montague, who worked at WPC, argued it was necessary for the power of environmental regulation to be taken away from the federal government and to be given to the “capable hands of local landowners and private conservation organizations.” “By shifting the power of conservation decisions away from the federal government and into the capable hands of local landowners and private conservation organizations, we can all start working toward a policy that recognizes the needs of business, individual landowners and the environment.”⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Aaron Kunkler, “Sen. Kuderer, others discuss Washington state health care,” Redmond Reporter, July 27, 2017.

⁵⁶ Spokesman Review, accessed January 17, 2011.

⁵⁷ “LAW ENFORCEMENT: Report: Blacks more likely to be convicted under ‘three strikes’ law,” Seattle Associated Press, February 19, 2002.

⁵⁸ Florangela Davila, “State ‘three-strikes’ law hits blacks disproportionately,” The Seattle Times, February 18, 2002.

⁵⁹ The Bellingham Herald, May 4, 2002

For more on the Washington Policy Center, the State Policy Network, the Freedom Foundation and other far-right extremist organizations visit accountablenw.com