

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 defame' 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



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."

Against Worker s 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."

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." In January 2014, Erin Shannon, also came out against raising the minimum wage.

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

For Privatizin g 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."

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

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

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

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

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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