

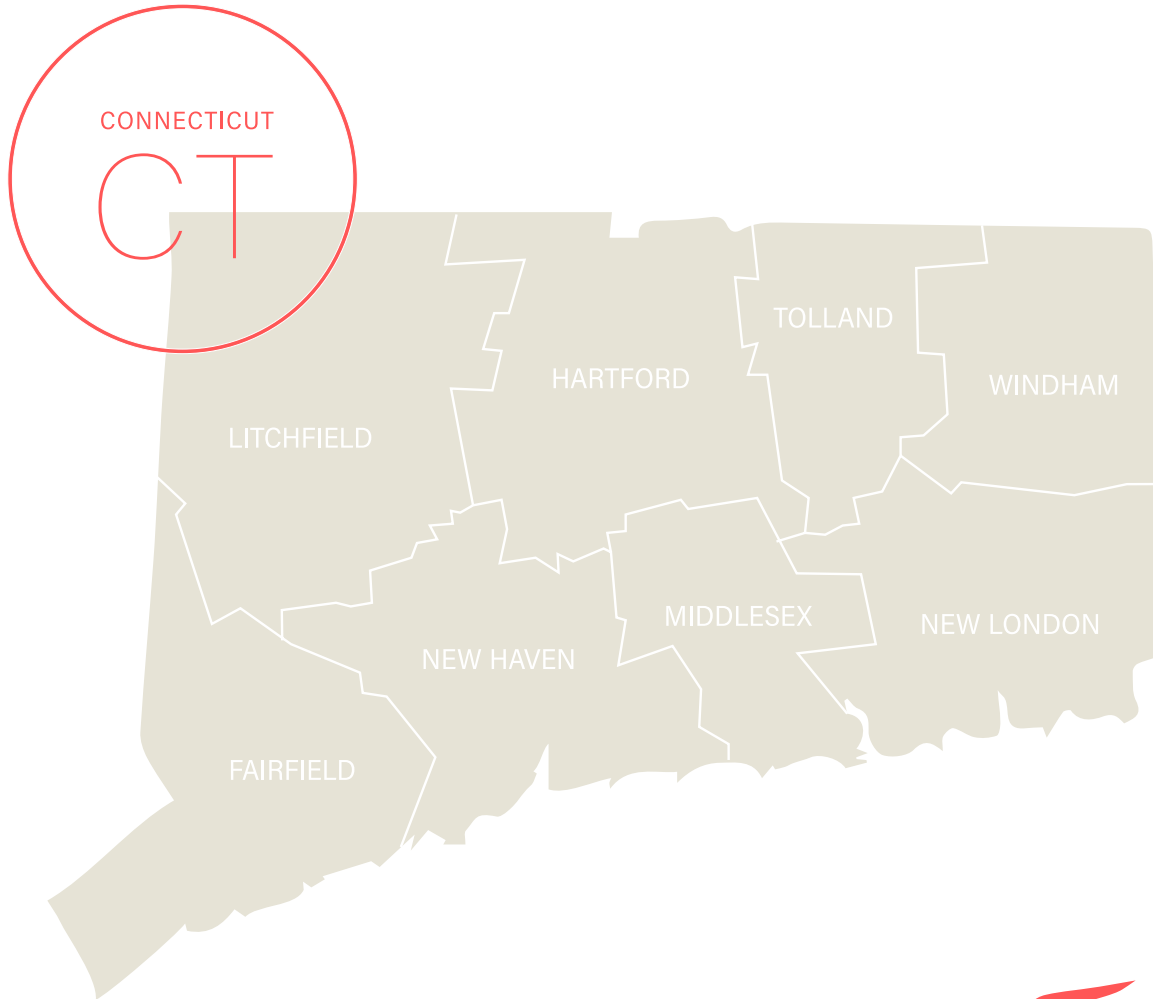
MARCH 2022

Yankee Institute's Shadowy Right-Wing Donors



RECOVERY FOR ALL OR RECOVERY FOR THE FEW?

— MARCH 2022 —



YANKEE INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY

(**YIPP**) is a right-wing think tank in Hartford, Connecticut founded in 1984. YIPP is a member of the Koch-Brother-funded **State Policy Network (SPN)**, a network of state-based conservative organizations that works closely with the **American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC)** to develop model legislation.

State Policy Network affiliates, like the Yankee Institute, aggressively lobby state and local elected officials to push policies benefiting the ultra wealthy and corporations.¹



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Yankee Institute has Shadowy Anonymous Donors with Deep Pockets. The Yankee Institute reported over \$2.3M in total revenues in 2018 (the latest tax forms available). **Yankee Institute's multimillion dollar budget has grown by a staggering 360% in a seven year period.**³

QUESTION: What has fueled the rapid growth of the Yankee Institute?

ANSWER: While the Yankee Institute does not disclose funders on its annual tax forms,⁴ an investigation by the Center for Media and Democracy identified some of the group's largest funders.

This investigation revealed the Yankee Institute receives significant donations, in some cases millions, from anonymous donor-advised funds and conservative foundations.

The Yankee Institute's Major Donors:

- Donors Capital Fund: \$1,908,190 (2004-2016)
- DonorsTrust: \$1,816,800 (2011-2018)
- State Policy Network: \$231,800 (2015-2018)
- JM Foundation: \$100,000 (2015-2019)
- Bradley Foundation: \$150,000 (2018-2019)⁵

DONOR SPOTLIGHT: The Yankee Institute runs its anti-union front campaign Connecticut "Workers" with backing from the Bradley Foundation, one of the country's largest conservative funders.

The right-wing Bradley Foundation spent over \$5.6M in 2018 to attack unions that represent teachers and public employees.

This includes a sizable \$100,000 grant to the Yankee Institute for its anti-union front campaign called "CT Workers."⁶

According to a Center for Media and Democracy investigation, "CT Workers claims to 'be a

community for Connecticut public employees interested in talking about workplace rights,' but the people seem to be missing. Instead, the site provides government union members in Connecticut with a form they can fill out so that they can receive 'help' in not paying union dues. The website does not disclose that it is run by the Yankee Institute."⁷

Donor Capital Fund and Donors Trust Funnel Millions in Anonymous Donations to Yankee Institute

Yankee Institute received over \$3 million in anonymous donations over a nearly 15 year period from Donor Capital Fund and DonorsTrust. These two donor-advised funds are focused on “limited government, personal responsibility, and free enterprise.”⁸ These pooled funds do not release information on donors. In fact, donors are allowed to remain fully anonymous, according to DonorTrust, “especially [for] gifts funding sensitive or controversial issues.”⁹

What kind of “controversial” issues does this involve? In addition to its millions in donations to the Yankee Institute, Donor Capital Fund and DonorsTrust has given thousands of grants to extreme right-wing groups around the country.

Troublingly, this includes millions in grants to hate groups (as designated by the Southern Poverty Law Center), including:



- David Horowitz Freedom Center, which promotes anti-Muslim bigotry and has past links to Milo Yiannopoulos and Proud Boys founder Gavin MacInnes.¹⁰
-> \$2M in Donor Capital Fund/DonorsTrust donations, 2010-2019.¹¹



- Center for Security Policy, which promotes anti-Muslim bigotry and has even been banned from the Conservative Political Action Conference.¹²
-> \$4M in Donor Capital Fund/DonorsTrust donations, 2010-2019¹³



- VDARE, which runs a white nationalist, anti-immigrant website that posts openly racist and anti-Semitic content.¹⁴
-> \$1.5M in DonorsTrust donations, 2010-2019.¹⁵



- The New Century Foundation, which publishes the magazine “American Renaissance” that promotes racist pseudoscience
-> \$10,500 in DonorsTrust donations, 2019).¹⁶

Donor Capital Fund and DonorsTrust have also bankrolled:¹⁷ the Project on Fair Representation, which funded two Supreme Court lawsuits that resulted in the elimination of key provisions of the 1965 Voting Rights Act,¹⁸ weakening the act and encouraging suppression and disenfranchisement of the Black vote in the process; the Daily Caller News Foundation, which has published Jason Kessler (an organizer of the 2017 Charlottesville “Unite the Right Rally”) and other white nationalist groups;¹⁹ the American Freedom Defense Initiative, whose signature program is “Stop Islamization of America;”²⁰ and Turning Point USA, a right-wing group active on college campuses whose sister organization, Turning Point Action, participated in the January 6th “March to Save America” rally in DC.²¹

In total, DonorsTrust has distributed over \$1.1 billion to 1,900 plus groups.²² It reported over \$323M in revenues in 2019 alone.²³ The scale and scope of this anonymous giving is significant—and Yankee Institute is a major Connecticut-based recipient of these donations.

Donor Capital Fund and DonorsTrust have deep and longstanding ties with Koch-backed initiatives

The Yankee Institute is not the only right-wing think tank in the State Policy Network receiving large donations from non-transparent pooled funds. According to the Center for Public Integrity, at least 51 State Policy Network affiliates have received money from DonorsTrust.²⁴ In just a four year period, Donor Capital Fund and DonorsTrust sent nearly \$50 million to SPN and 55 member think tanks.²⁵ Donor Capital Fund and DonorsTrust are run by conservative figure Lawson R. Bader, who is also on the board of the State Policy Network.²⁶

US Senators issued a scathing rebuke, with a cc to the Yankee Institute, of the State Policy Institute’s unaccountable funding sources

Yankee Institute President Carol Platt Liebau was cc-ed on a 2016 letter on the State Policy Network, sent from nine US Senators (including Sen. Elizabeth Warren, Sen. Bernie Sanders, and Sen. Chuck Schumer). The letter included a powerful indictment of the network’s funding scheme:

“Because your organizations do not regularly disclose where your donations come from, we cannot know for sure how deep and wide the web of denial truly is. Here is what we do know: by simply looking at public information, we see that all but one of your organizations are part of the State Policy Network (SPN). SPN has received nearly \$20 million from identity-scrubbing, Koch-funded Donors Trust and Donors Capital, as well as money directly from Koch family foundations. SPN serves as an identity launderer as well, passing along large sums of money to several of the groups on your letter.”²⁷

Yankee Institute president Carol Platt Liebau penned an op-ed publicly defending the Koch Brothers. In her words:

“The Kochs have made their money by making and selling products that other businesses, or the public, want or need.”²⁸ The article makes no mention of her or YIPP’s longstanding ties with the Koch-funded SPN network.

Yankee Institute uses these donations to push incredibly harmful policies, including opposition to public financing of elections

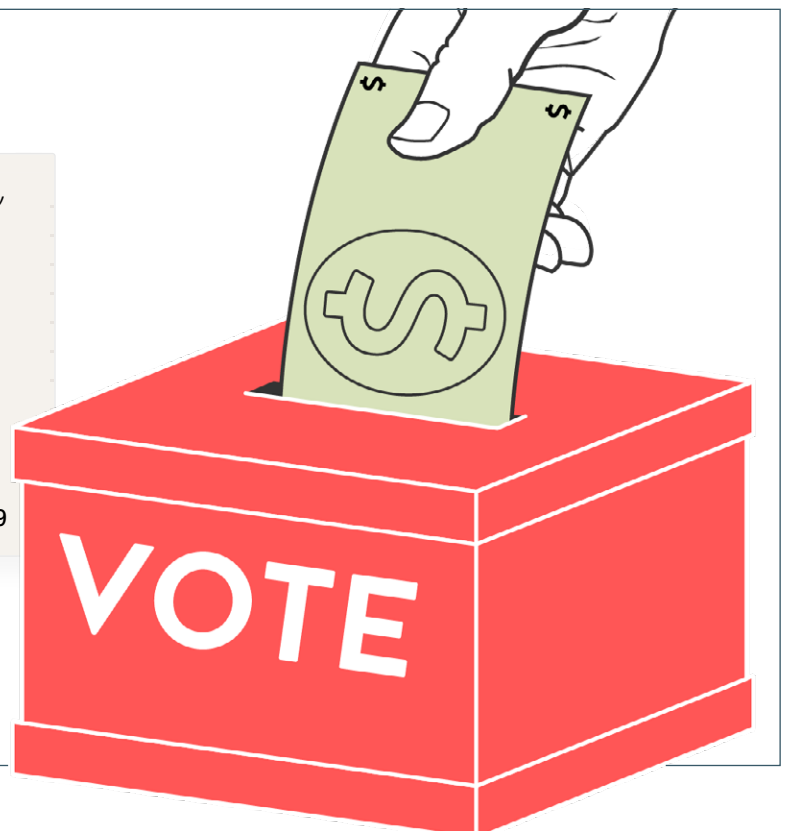
The Yankee Institute is a vocal opponent of public financing of elections.²⁹ It has called on the state of Connecticut to “terminate” the Citizen’s Election Program³⁰ and has opposed legislation that would make political donations more transparent.³¹ It argues that “‘dark money’ is more properly characterized as ‘safe public participation,’ especially in times like these, when those who believe in free minds and free markets are regularly made the objects of harassments and driven from the public square.”³²

YIPP even petitioned the Supreme Court in response to efforts to make elections more transparent and elected officials more accountable:

“We at the Yankee Institute believe taxpayer-funded ‘matching grants’ violate the First Amendment free speech rights of candidates and their supporters. Going further, we do not believe the state has a compelling interest in using tax dollars to ‘level the playing field’ by equalizing financial resources between candidates,” said Fergus Cullen, [former] executive director of the Yankee Institute, a free-market think tank.”³³

“Despite the negative branding, ‘dark money’ is more properly characterized as ‘safe public participation,’ especially in times like these, when those who believe in free minds and free markets are regularly made the objects of harassments and driven from the public square.”

—Yankee Institute, 2019



A Real Recovery For All

Two years into the global pandemic, residents across Connecticut are continuing to suffer from the biggest crisis we have ever faced in our lifetimes.

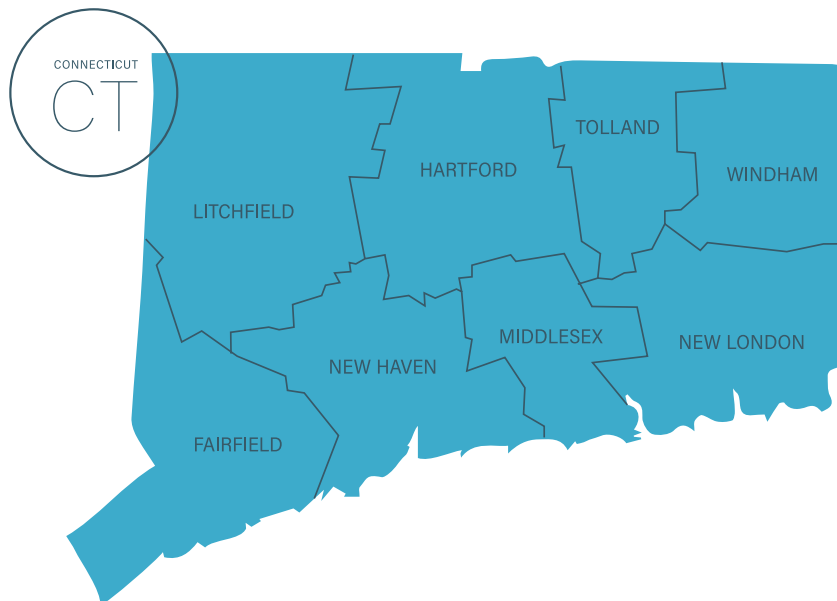
This crisis has exposed and exacerbated our state's extreme racial, economic, and gender disparities. Since the start of the pandemic, Connecticut's twelve billionaires have seized \$15.5B in additional wealth—on average, that's more than \$1 billion each. At the same time, hundreds of thousands of working people, especially workers of color and women workers, are struggling to survive and make ends meet in the face of low wages, housing insecurity, hunger, and lack of access to basic needs.

In this moment of historic crisis, following the Yankee Institute's vision of protecting billionaires, busting unions, and cutting services would spell disaster for the vast majority of working people across Connecticut.

Rather than perpetuating the failed austerity policies which have fueled rising inequalities over the last few decades, Connecticut must adopt state budgets that will reduce and eliminate those inequalities. This means:

- **Making dramatic public investments** in education, health care, child care, housing, and social services—all the resources our communities need to flourish.
- **Providing targeted relief** that will raise living standards for working people, in particular the workers of color and women workers who have sacrificed disproportionately during the pandemic.
- **Repairing our deeply regressive tax structure** by requiring the wealthiest residents and corporations to contribute more of what they owe to the future of our communities.

We want a state where all residents have the chance to live healthy, fulfilling, dignified lives—no matter where they live, what they look like, or how much money they make. It's time for Connecticut to adopt state budgets that will address our unprecedented crisis of human need and lay the foundation for a real Recovery For All.



Contributors



Recovery For All CT is a statewide coalition of labor, community, and faith organizations representing more than half a million residents—Black, Brown, and white. We are united in a long-term mission to eliminate the extreme inequalities in this state and build a more just, democratic, and egalitarian Connecticut.

<https://www.recoveryforallct.com/>



The Center for Popular Democracy is a nonprofit organization that promotes equity, opportunity, and a dynamic democracy in partnership with innovative base-building organizations, organizing networks and alliances, and progressive unions across the country.

www.populardemocracy.org



The Hedge Clippers are working to expose the mechanisms hedge funds and billionaires use to influence government and politics in order to expand their wealth, influence and power. We're exposing the collateral damage billionaire-driven politics inflicts on our communities, our climate, our economy and our democracy. We're calling out the politicians that do the dirty work billionaires demand, and we're calling on all Americans to stand up for a government and an economy that works for all of us, not just the wealthy and well-connected. <https://hedgeclippers.org/about>

Endnotes

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