Inform Your Giving: Funding the Fight
Right Wing Funding & What We’re Up Against

Panelists: Dr. Abbas Barzegar, Claire Provost, Ethan Fauré and Jasmine Banks

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Aidan Orly: I’m excited to introduce our first speaker, Ethan Fauré, who is a researcher here at Political Research Associates, focusing on movements promoting anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim and White nationalist ideologies. They joined PRA after working with the Center for New Community for five years, authoring groundbreaking reports on anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim activity in the U.S. Ethan works closely with many other researchers, journalists, national organizations and grassroots activists to deepen their understanding of these anti-democratic forces and informing resistance efforts on the ground and building power across the country. Thank you, Ethan, and thanks for for opening us up.

Ethan Fauré: Well, great. Thank you so much, Aidan, and thank you everyone for being here today. So there are a variety of ways right-wing ideologues use money to both consolidate and expand their wealth and power. One way this occurs is largely at the individual level, where wealthy people can substantially donate to candidates for political office or support campaigns that protect their interests. An example coming from Illinois that I— that I recall often is a billionaire hedge fund donor spending tens of millions of dollars to successfully defeat a 2020 referendum that would have created a more protective— more progressive taxation system in Illinois. But the more drastic examples here are the more forward thinking ones that require years or more often decades of sustained support for institutions that bolster unjust policies and systemic inequities. This is where the world of right-wing philanthropy and the institutions that it has created that we’re talking about here today come into play.

For decades, the Right has created and sustained organizations shaping U.S.
policy. PRA’s website contains profiles and in-depth articles on many of these organizations detailing their activities. If you go to the profiles on the right section of our research page, for example, you can find a list of many of these organizations involved here. But over the last 50 years, these organizations have fostered a conservative movement that has leveraged power in an unrepresentative system dramatically in its favor. The Federalist Society’s often noted success, seating a supreme court that is actively stripping millions of people of their rights, is one of the most prominent examples. But it’s not the final one either. The same people, namely the Federalist Society leader Leonard Leo, is now undergoing similar efforts to influence other sectors of society, ranging from the economy to other sectors of civil service in order to entrench these harmful ideologies and continue to have them expand across all factors of public life. And, you know, like I said, the Supreme Court is not where this ended.

These organizations are still going today. The Heritage Foundation, notorious for its influence on the Reagan administration, whose legacy we’re all reckoning with still, is commemorating its 50th anniversary this year. The Heritage also recently announced that it received its largest gift ever, $25 million over five years. This is coming from a family whose support of Heritage and other right-wing institutions goes back to the 1970s. That’s 50 years of sustained support of the Heritage Foundation and others have received as they pursued policies across the country. One of the ways that Heritage can use that new gift would be continuing its work attacking trans rights and the lives of trans people in states across the country. Heritage is one of a couple of organizations, including the other well-resourced institutions like the Alliance Defending Freedom and the Family Policy Alliance, who lead together the coalition, or a campaign, called The Promise to America’s Children that is often behind many of these legislative attacks. My brilliant colleague at PRA Heron Greensmith first reported on this campaign’s existence in 2021.

These organizations’ state level efforts have created this horrendous environment where legislative attacks on LGBTQ people have exploded in recent years. This year alone, according to the Equality Federation State Legislation Tracker, right-wing lawmakers have introduced over 350 anti-trans bills in 47 states, and that number is growing, too. Here in Rhode Island, where I am now, one was introduced just yesterday. So the way that these organizations are receiving some of this support, it frequently comes from something called donor advised funds or DAFs. They’re one of the most significant ways that right-wing—right-wing donors are able to funnel support to organizations. And they do so because it often allows them to maintain anonymity. The two most prominent sources of support for many right-wing organizations over the years
are the two funds known as Donors Capital Fund and Donors Trust. However, many of the country’s largest financial institutions are increasingly adopting and encouraging the use of DAFs in philanthropy and with that facilitating the support of right-wing institutions like Heritage.

Another area of PRA’s work involves supporting the Unmasking Fidelity Coalition, which is led by grassroots organizers and directly impacted people in Boston, where Fidelity is headquartered. The Coalition is challenging Fidelity Charitable’s role in facilitating millions of dollars via its DAFs to organizations like Heritage and others that promote bigotry and further systemic oppression globally by implementing policies adopted by other financial institutions. The Amalgamated Foundation is one such example whose “Hate is Not Charitable” campaign garnered support from over 90 other foundations. My co-panelists have also done excellent work investigating and organizing against the harms created by right-wing philanthropy. I’m grateful to be alongside them here and look forward to learning more with everyone else today very much.

Aidan Orly: Thank you, Ethan, for providing that intro and overview of some key areas of— to look out for in terms of anti-democratic funding. Certainly the Heritage Foundation is one of the largest think tanks on the Right. And well, we’re going to learn more from other speakers about privatization and the role of donor advised funds and other streams. So thank you for opening us up.

I’m now pleased to pass the mic to Jasmine Banks, who has spent the last five years dedicating— dedicated to leading an intervention campaign called Un-Koch My Campus, addressing the impact of far right billionaires leveraging their philanthropic donations in higher education to erode democracy. During the campaigns, she organized multiple campuses, coalitions and provided movement support to hundreds of students, educators and community activists, and has traveled to a number of higher education institutions to speak with students and faculty about donor transparency and academic freedom. She was most recently honored to give a keynote for the Higher Education Division of the American Federation of Teachers and has more than 10 years of progressive advocacy, movement-building and organizing experience. In addition to her roles at Un-Koch My Campus, Jasmine is a national speaker on radical self-care for people of color, a workshop facilitator for Waking Up White ally training, and a national workshop facilitator for cross movement collaboration. Jasmine co-founded Reconcile Arkansas and co-produces Parenting Is Political with her wife, Mo. Jasmine is a mother of four, a proud Southerner and a passionate supporter of her queer Black community. And we’re very grateful that you’re here with us today. Thank you so much, Jasmine.
Jasmine Banks: Yeah, thank you so much for having me. Before I even get started, I want to call in my elders. I want to thank my grandmother, Annie Pearl, who— she's passed. I want to thank Suzanne Pharr. I want to thank the Alabama Communist Party and all the working Southern Black and Brown folks that make my life possible. I also want to share a little bit about my future.

Right now, we have just relocated from Arkansas. We came to D.C. in October escaping fascist conditions. And I don't say that like someone on the Internet, on Instagram might say fascism about everything. I'm talking about real fascism. It's never been far from the material conditions of my life, and that's my daughter, Zara on The New York Times. And so when I talk about who I am, it's important, not just because identity shapes our realities, but it also, you know, my politics. I'm an impacted person by these very things that we're trying to talk about around right-wing funding, right?

So I came to Un-Koch My Campus having no idea who Charles Koch was because I was just a kid from Oklahoma who's a regular, degeral, shmegular person. I didn't go to a fancy academic institution, but I do know how to organize people because I come from a family of community organizers. And I took the job and thought, "I'm just going to do something that has nothing to do with my personal lived life." Because, you know, it's hard out here in these streets for working poor people like myself. And then I began to read PRA's work. I began to read other re— researchers, and I realized every single layer of my life where I had been disenfranchised, impacted, or had to face fascist conditions had come as a result of the funding of Charles Koch. So if y'all could put that slide so we can talk about his theory of change?

So now I run Un-Koch My Campus. It is one of the pieces of my life's work. And let me get to my notes. And so I'm going to go through really quickly, and I'm Southern, so I talk fast, so you'll have to bear with me. I'm going to go through his theory of change, but then I'm going to pivot really hard and not talk about what he funds inside of the organism— or excuse me, inside of institutions of education, but how he funds, because that's more important for folks who want to mount a broad defense to change their behavior. Right? I don't want to be the person who brings a calculator to a party with their rich friends, is what I'm telling you. So I'm trying not to talk numbers and polls.

So the first step in Charles Koch's theory of change is what he calls his structure of social change is universities. He begins to invest in a university that already has likely been underfunded because he's done a really good job of eroding public interest and public funding for our civil society institutions that are pillars of our democracy. The next thing he does— once he gets into the university, he invests in them to drive big studies and big ideas that underpin his policy goals, specifically around research and curriculum that emphasizes
the benefits of capitalism, free market privatization. Oftentimes this can be directly with an educator, or it can be the program itself.

Right. The next thing he does is he begins to invest in think tanks that turn the big ideas that were developed that are winning the battle of ideas inside of institutions of education and put them into real world policies. These policies come in forms of suggestions, and so those grass tops, makers and influencers like the White House, like Congress, like the state legislators, judges and media, they begin to help to transmit all and reproduce all of those ideas as though they were their own. They also shape culture, interestingly enough, through all kinds of like, big media and influence.

The next thing they do is they grab on to the activist groups. They get activist organizations to build a wider public support for policies developed in those think tanks. And then they pressure the same grassroots decision makers the think tanks are working to influence. This allows Koch to give the appearance that his ideas are highly favorable and that they’re coming from grassroots or coming from a bottom up strategy, which is one of the things that he likes to say. And he’s been working on that strategy in particular since 2018. He shifted a little bit, but we can go into that if y’all have questions. And then through this process, Koch Industries and other corporate donors, I like to call them fascist giving circles, are able to invest their wealth in federal and state election campaigns. This also helps to ensure that their academics, think tanks and advocacy groups are likely to be applying pressures to already sympathetic lawmakers or feeling confused about the long, hard work of good governance.

Ultimately, the goal of this theory of change is to stop all kinds of government regulation completely and to protect the private ownership. Right? So what you have is free market true believers and the other group, which is socialism for me and my corporation, but none for thee. Okay, so there’s no evil cabal. There’s no like, shadow thing happening. They’re doing this all within the law and within the system, because the system is capitalism. They fund their ideas, they play by the rules of capitalism. And one of the rules of decaying capitalism, particularly within the United States context, is that fascism is easier than the long work of building other political projects or other ways of governance. They also— I’m jumping now into how they fund, which is super important. They leave their grantees alone. They fund them for long periods of time and then let them do the idea work. They also layer all of their funding through every part of our society, right? In the culture production in the institutions, in the judiciary. Every single part. And then they—they’re united by something bigger, right? But they understand that something bigger that they’re united by was something that was imagined inside of the psyche, the consciousness of Whiteness, which is not to say White people, but Whiteness.
Left philanthropy does a really good job of avoiding, or funding the things that they’re trying to avoid, right? That they don’t want to have happen. Whereas Charles Koch and his, you know, his friends and homies. They fund the world they do want to live in, and they know that the fascists will do a good job of allowing them to maintain their private control over this— this whole project that we’re all a part of. And so more and more, what you will be seeing inside this strategy, they have, they have the inside game, which is a part of where on Koch’s work sit. But they also have the outside game. They’re building their own universities that are very anti-authoritarian, anti-democratic. And then while they’re doing that, they’re building out a shadow judge— judiciary. Right? So they’re being very— they’re being very judicial— or, excuse me— they’re being very rigorous and thoughtful about their strategy. They are putting people inside courts currently that will in the future do exactly what they want for the world that they’re trying to live in.

And so if there’s really anything that I could say is that you need to be funding projects that allow for the conditions where people can take back what belongs to the people. And one of those, though I was not a part of the group that was imagined to belong to institutions of higher education when it was being built. It can be reclaimed for people like me, for all of us, and for, you know, a broader political future where we all have what we need instead of those few corporate private monopoly capitalists. So I’ll stop there.

Aidan Orly: Wow. Really— yeah. Really. Thank you, Jasmine, for, first of all, just, actually starting off with bringing us back to the very human impacts of all of this and calling in the ancestors and then outlining— outlining that process so clearly and also hardening us back to what the goal is, where we want to be. And well, I want to come back to that, too, because I know sometimes these conversations can feel a little disheartening. But there is also so much amazing work being done, including yours. So thank you again for sharing that with us.

Our next speaker is Clare Provost, who I’m pleased to introduce as an investigative journalist and feminist. She was OpenDemocracy’s Head of Global Investigations, where she founded the Tracking the Backlash project to investigate organized anti-rights opposition around the world and established a fellowship program for young women and LGBTIQ reporters to support a more inclusive global media ecosystem. She has previously worked at The Guardian as a data journalist and was a fellow at the Center for Investigative Journalism at Goldsmiths University of London. International investigations she has led have revealed the scale of U.S. Christian Right funding around the world and the use of lawfare, corporate misinformation and other strategies and tactics undermining rights and inequality. Her most recent major investigation,
published in December with CNN, that we’ll put in the chat, revealed how millions of dollars in aid money from donors that have pledged to support LGBT rights globally actually went to religious groups in Ghana that have pushed for an extreme new anti-LGBT law. Her writing has also appeared in outlets including Al Jazeera, Foreign Policy, The Independent and New York Review of Books. Thank you so much, Claire, for being here. I’m really, really, really pleased that I’ll be able to hear from you and that we all are.

**Claire Provost:** Thank you. Thank you. Can you hear me?

**Aidan Orly:** Yes, we can.

**Claire Provost:** Okay. Wonderful. Thank you so much for that introduction. And thank you to the speakers who have already spoken and to PRA for organizing this session. So I come at these issues from the, as the introduction outlined, from the perspective of an investigative journalist who has spent much of the last 5 to 6 years following the money, as well as strategies, networks and impacts of organized and transnational opposition to sexual and reproductive rights, including from the U.S. Christian Right. I’m based in Italy, and I was an investigative journalist before I started looking at these issues, and I came to them with follow-the-money experience from other areas like following international aid, trade, tax, investment, things like that. And like those other areas, a lot of this money, money I’ll talk about today, crosses borders as well and supports various and complicated intersecting strategies to threaten democracies around the world. But unlike those other areas that I mentioned, like aid, trade, tax investment, these funding flows are relatively under scrutinized, which should change. And we have proof, including the work that we’ve already heard about, we’ll hear more about today, that it also can change and that scrutinizing these funding flows can also have impact.

So I wanted to share a bit about my experience looking at this money. And so at the UK Independent Media Open Democracy, I led a project that in 2020, so already a couple of years ago, revealed that $280 million in the 10 years from 2007 and 2018 from 28 Christian—U.S. Christian Right groups had been spent around the world. Many of these groups were members of the World Congress of Families network that organizes opposition to women’s and LGBT rights. Many had links to the Trump administration. Many— all of them were very clear in pushing for anti-democratic objectives to limit the participation, representation and even existence of diverse individuals. According to that data, which came from an analysis of 990 financial filings in the U.S., those organizations spent more money in Europe than anywhere else outside the U.S.
So outside the U.S., Europe was first with about 90 million, followed by Africa with about 50 million. But a lot of that project was about using mixed methods to really understand not just how much money, but with what consequence, like why should we care about it and to tell compelling stories.

So following the money further to the ground and working with reporters in different countries all over the world, we revealed that this money and these groups had done a variety of different, terrifying things. For example, funded lawfare attacks against women’s and LGBT rights and courts from the European Court of Human Rights to national courts, including in Poland, around the abortion laws in that country. They had hosted trainings for African politicians to teach them how to lobby against sex education and LGBT rights issues. They promoted COVID conspiracy theories and other misinformation about health and rights across Latin America and in other regions. They’d also sought to secretly influence elections and referenda, including the 2019 European elections, in favor of the Far Right and the abortion referendum in Ireland as examples. And this was an impactful project at the time. These—those findings were cited hundreds of times across the global media, including by The Guardian, Al Jazeera and Reuters. Dozens of European politicians publicly condemned what was found, called for further inquiries. A number of individual countries’ parliaments also called for, and in some cases began their own, investigations and inquiries into the spending. This data is also still regularly cited, even though it is from several years ago now, including in some of the recent coverage of Uganda’s anti-LGBT bill. I saw it recently in the Washington Post again so that—those findings continue to circulate.

Meanwhile, we know from other research that Christian Right funding and U.S. Christian Right funding is often mixed with other sources of funding in the budgets of organizations that are pushing right-wing, anti-democratic goals. So for example, in 2012, research from the European Parliamentary Forum on Sexual and Reproductive Rights looked at, in Europe only, across many, many different sources of finance and financial information, and found much larger amounts of money than I had found looking only at the U.S. Christian Right and found that within Europe, while the U.S. Christian Right spends more of its international money in Europe than any other region, in that region, in Europe, there’s also significant Russian funding as well as domestic funding and some surprising sources of funding, potentially, including from some public budgets, from some corporate budgets, from some corporate social responsibility budgets.

And so the story that Aidan also mentioned in the introduction that I worked on recently, showing aid funding for anti-LGBT Christian conservative groups in Ghana, that money didn’t come from the U.S. Christian Right officially,
at least. There was some money from the U.S. government, but the other money came from donors like the U.K. and Germany that—the U.K. at the same time as the financial transfers happened, was co-chair of the Equal Rights Coalition internationally. So this is more unexpected funding and that work was based on yet another data source, other data sources, OCD, and IAD—International Aid Data— it was published with CNN in May, and its findings made the AMANPOUR program, which again reflects, I think, this large potential public and media interest in work like this.

So we need more of this work. It’s basically, I think, where I wanted to end my comments, you know, we do need more updated and regular and detailed data collection and analysis of right-wing funding and its impacts. There needs to be a more widely shared capacity and skills to do this work, which can be methodologically complex. And I think importantly, there needs to be more spaces and energy for collaborations across disciplines. I know when I was starting this work, PRA— in particular when I was starting this work, but also, you know, throughout— PRA is an example of such an important part of this ecosystem in terms of the— not just the research and the work that is done, but also the generosity of people that answer questions and help brainstorm when you come up against methodologically complex issues. So thank you for that in the past. Thank you for this session today. And I look forward to hearing from the last speaker and then the questions.

Aidan Orly: Thank you, Claire. And also, of course, for that shout out. But I— Christian Right funding is particularly difficult to track because so much of it is locked up in organizations that are registered as churches and aren’t required to report, at least in the U.S. So I really appreciate both your insight into some of that funding, but also the global— the global investigations you’ve done. And thank you also for joining us so late in the evening in Italy. And as you all are listening, if you have questions, we’ll collect them. If you put them in the chat or, as I mentioned at the beginning but for those of you who are just joining us, we’ll have time at the end of the call for more audience discussion and questions.

So I’m pleased to introduce our final speaker. Before I then ask a couple of follow-up questions to our panelists. But Dr. Abbas Barzegar is coming to us as the director of the Horizon Forum, where he stewards its collaborative and stakeholder-centric research programming. He is a term member of the Council on Foreign Relations and maintains research and teaching affiliations with Indiana University’s Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, Emory University’s Master’s and Development program, and George Mason’s Ali Vural Ak Center for Global Islamic Studies. He has years of applied research experience covering
transnational Muslims, the civil society at the intersection of global Islamic revival and geopolitical conflict. Barzegar led the Hijacked by Hate study on U.S. philanthropy and anti-Muslim special interest groups. In addition to numerous articles and book chapters, he is also the coauthor of Islamism: Contested Perspectives on Political Islam. His commentary and analysis can be found on a variety of media outlets, including CNN, Fox, The Guardian, The Hill, Huffington Post and Al Jazeera. And thank you so much for being here. Dr. Barzegar.

Dr. Abbas Barzegar: Hello. Hello. Thank you, Aidan, and PRA for the invitation. It’s a pleasure to be here. As you may have heard from the— from the bio notes, my background, just to share, is actually in academia. And I fell into this space of philanthropy by, you know, one of my research interest areas, which is around American-Muslim civil society. But I owe it to my wife, Kareema Shu’ara of the American University of Cairo, for really helping me with understanding the economics and philanthropic dimensions of some of the issues that— that we’re dealing with here.

And so today, I’d like to touch a bit— I’d like to touch a bit about anti-Muslim funding, but also how it fits into a larger ecosystem that I think everybody else here is commenting upon. And so, like most— like most of you are familiar, the types of organizations that appear to be problematic on the Far Right and in extremist circles, you know, they’re part of a larger ecosystem that is funded in very mainstream and institutional ways. And so it becomes difficult to draw a line between what is a truly, truly bad actor, bad faith actor, possibly illegal type of activity, and those who are really part of mainstream political discourse, regardless of how polarized or extremist that discourse has been. And so American Muslim organizations have had to witness over the last 15 years or so, 20 years, really since 9/11, they’ve had to witness the movement from fringe, you know, fringe radical extremist groups with really anti-Muslim rhetoric, Islamophobic rhetoric, move into the mainstream ecosystem of civil society, think tanks, public discourse, universities. And then finally, during the Trump administration, fully embedded within the administration itself.

And at the time I was— at the time of sort of the last two years of the Trump administration, I was the— I was the research and policy director of the Council on American Islamic Relations in Washington, DC. And we were mapping out this ecosystem as part of our biannual Islamophobia report and as a subcomponent of that report, we always track funding and the institutional linkages around funding. And it was then that I first discovered what a donor advised fund was. This was in the fall of 2018 or so, and began to understand that it is not simply the— the kind of no-names, the Sheldon Adelsons or
the Mercer families, but it is instead a whole network of institutions and philanthropy that are funding things that are contrary to philanthropy. And so it was this gap that we sought to expose within the Hijacked by Hate report. So we really transitioned our normal— our normal reporting that year to focus just upon the way in which philanthropy was being used to fund and funnel, you know— you know, funnel this kind of rhetoric. And I use that language quite deliberately in that philanthropy was being used. It is very easy to sort of make the case that philanthropic institutions themselves are responsible for some of this. But the closer you take a look in the way in which donor advised funds operate within the ecosystem, how donors are related to various types of community foundations or national— national DAF providers, you realize that there is a sort of usurpation or, you know, a kind of exploitation of the philanthropic system itself taking place.

So what we did is around that time we began to organize stakeholders around, you know, folks like Amalgamated Foundation, which had just begun its own work in this area, SPLC and others. And we began to hold a series of dialogs and conversations on identifying ways in which not just anti-Muslim funding could be stopped, but how is it that we could put a dent or make some kind of significant impact in this area around anti-hate funding as a whole? There were a number of dialogs that took place, a number of subsequent reports that came out. And then finally, in fall of 2020, we established the Horizon Forum as a dedicated platform just to help institutional philanthropy manage this problem.

And I'd like to share just a few of the things that we've learned in the course of our work. And this is largely around the areas of due diligence, risk management, etc. And so let me start by DAFs. We all know, again, what donor advised funds are, or most of us should know. These are— these are— the best and sort of most succinct way to think about it is a private charitable checking account that is set up and there is a lot of discourse around the way in which DAFs have been used over the last decade to hoard wealth, to sort of take advantage of loopholes within the tax system. And by some estimates, there's over $300 billion locked up in donor advised funds around the country, which is an enormous amount of money when you think about that money, have, you know, should be in some ways going to, you know, going to active charitable causes.

However, the reform conversation around donor advised funds has been extremely polarized, and that's somewhere that I'd like to start. It is not simply the case that donor advised funds are the tool or a tool of the Right, and it is far too simple to suggest that donor advised funds are the problem. In fact, this was one of our first questions and the kind of stakeholder-centered research we did.
We asked directly, “Are donor advised funds the problem?” And what we found is no, the donor advised funds themselves are not as an institution necessarily the problem. First and foremost, it is a common belief, and I was a subscriber to this belief, that donor advised funds are often used to simply hide one’s identity. Research by the— by the Lilly School of Philanthropy has actually shown that the majority of donor advised fund holders actually disclose their identity upon their— upon their receipt. That might not be visible in various ways, but they simply use foundations like Fidelity, Schwab, Donors Trust or, you know, one of the 500 community foundations around the country. They use them because they’re easy to use. They’re easy and functional institutions. They’re good fiduciary institutions. They just operate just like a bank. And so what we found is that most people are disclosing and they’re very proud of who they’re funding, what they’re funding. There’s only very few cases where we have found in our work directly with foundations where a donor is actually exploiting an institution to try to hide their identity. More often than not, when a donor is confronted with a grantee recommendation that goes against their values, they proudly defend that choice and move their money to another foundation. But anyway, so just on that note, donor advised funds as an institution are not necessarily the problem is— was what we have found. And in fact, many of our own stakeholders that are part and invested, you know, that are part of the coalition and part of and heavily invested in combating hate and various forms of structural harm, reforming DAFs is not at the top of the agenda.

And so one of the things that, you know, I’ve been concerned about is operating the spaces that, you know, the target on DAFs as an institution is not necessarily— I don’t necessarily think the largest priority. The other area that I would just say is that the actual problem with asking philanthropy and foundations to sort of move their, you know, move their policies and procedures in such a way that they would conform with an anti-hate agenda or, you know, kind of a progressive agenda or an anti-harm agenda, is that they need from an institutional level, they need consistent policies, they need consistent definitions, just consistent practices. And this has been one of the largest stumbling blocks out there. And as you all know in the United States, hate itself, hate speech itself— and this might sound stark— but hate speech itself is not necessarily illegal. I know that sounds a little sort of counterintuitive, but hate speech itself is not necessarily illegal. The threshold in the United States for defamation, for hate speech, for speech being illegal is extremely, extremely high. And the threshold to enter into the civil society space as a nonprofit is extremely, extremely low. So there’s a huge risk exposure for foundations, just like higher education institutions, just like social media institutions that they
have to manage the public sphere. And one of the things that Horizon Forum has done is to be sympathetic to the position of institutional philanthropy having to manage that risk.

So we approach institutional philanthropy as partners to say, “How do we create systems and policies for you to better align your values that are stated out there?” You know, you’re putting your money, you’re putting your money where your mouth is. You’re granting tons and tons of money to, you know, socially progressive causes. Your board, your staff, everybody is aligned in a particular way. However, your DAF portfolios are funding something else. This mismatch is something that we’re trying to expose. They do the same thing with their investment dollars, right? And so most of the work that we’re involved in now becomes actually much, much more technical in nature than one might imagine. I mean, it’s much more procedural. It’s identifying definitions and processes and research standards whereby foundations can work as institutions to align their own values.

And I think, you know, my message today would be that, you know, for donors, stakeholders and advocates working in this space, is to understand that each foundation, each institution has its own—has its own constraints, its own boundaries, its own priorities. And we do have to really meet everybody with where they’re at in order to make their own—their own mission alignment, you know, aspirations come true, but we might not necessarily be, you know, in a position to rock the boat as much as we would like. We—instead we, you know, to work within this space, we have to really sort of meet them where they’re at, hold their hands walking through. And we’re happy that, you know, after two years of our work, we now— we now have taken on over 50 institutional clients, you know, our partners in this work. And so we’re proud— we’re proud to have made that progress. Everybody’s at a different stage, of course. But we’re happy to share more with you about some of some of the learning experiences we’ve had as well. Thank you.

**Aidan Orly:** Thank you, Dr. Barzegar. I think I really want to definitely I really want to follow back up on that. And I actually might just do that now. Just pose a couple of questions to all of you on the panel. Really appreciate the variety of areas of knowledge, expertise and work that you’re all coming from and bringing to us. And I think many of you have talked about the, you know, the challenges of understanding where the funding is coming from, the nuances of it. Who are the targets, who are not, how is the money being distributed? What are the processes? I would love to pose back a question to all of you. What are—the main challenges that we are facing in terms of understanding this funding? And some of you have already touched on this too, but what—
what can be done? What have you seen being done or elaborate—feel free to elaborate on what you’ve already brought up. And then after this, we’ll open it up to more audience discussion questions. And anyone’s welcome to take it.

**Claire Provost:** I can jump in because, you know, the transparency point is very important. And there are—there are huge challenges in tracking and understanding right-wing and anti-democratic funding streams both on like where the funding comes from and where the funding goes. And, you know, we saw that in our transnational investigations, but you would also see that in a domestic case, both, you know, where the money is coming from, where is it going. Both of those can be difficult to figure out. And there’s—and also the ecosystem of Christian Right and anti-democratic actors is not homogeneous. There’s lots of different types of organizations in it.

And so the work that I talked about before, about the Christian Right funding internationally that I was involved in tracking, that was specifically looking at U.S. Christian Right organizations that are registered as nonprofits. So right-wing civil society where there are financial disclosures that you can see. Some organizations, as Aidan mentioned, are registered as church organizations instead have different levels of disclosure or no disclosure or hard disclosure. Some organizations have been registered as normal nonprofits and then changed their registration to be church organizations. Even the ones that are—that file financial filings as nonprofits can have huge amounts of variety of detail in their filings. Some seem to like, export from their internal accounting system with a lot of detail. Some seem to scrub it. And so piecing that together, especially when you’re looking at like, chains of funding, like one organization funds another, funds another, funds another, and then it’s spent on stuff, that can be extremely hard to piece together. And so a lot of this work, you have to have caveats. And what we know is really like the tip of the iceberg of what’s there.

I do think that it’s kind of useful to think about the different funding flows too. Like there’s foundation funding and the things that have been discussed by other speakers like the donor advised funds and things like that, there’s also donations. There’s, you know, crowdfunding appeals, there’s advertisements, there’s partnerships with Amazon to get donations by Amazon. There’s publishing streams, there’s Christian Right movie production houses that like, sell movies. There—there’s public funding, there’s some aid funding in the picture, there’s some corporate social responsibility funding. And some of these are a bit more, I think, strategic to focus on than others in that when you think about where you might get impact. I’ve been thinking about this a lot recently and it’s one of the reasons why I’ve started looking at the aid funding stream
because unlike, you know, donations or conservative foundations where they may be doing what they’re supposed— they’re set up to do by funding Christian Right antidemocratic movements, public institutions that have publicly committed to support human rights. Like— I would— I would hope that exposing funding flows to things that contradict those values could have more possibility of change. But I would love to also know what others think about that idea.

**Jasmine Banks:** Yeah. One of the things that comes up for us is because they have a massive amount of capital, the boom and bust of the nonprofits, right? By the time our student organizers or our community stakeholders get the records requests that often we have to fight and fight and fight for, they’ve already shuttered the nonprofit and launched a new one under a new name. And when they do that, and they are able to pair with the power that’s already been organized on the local level in particular, we get— you know, we get the culture war that you see now with critical race theory and that whole conversation. Moms for Liberty, for example, was a community group that was astroturfed with Koch funding. And now, you know, Chris Rufo and all these people are now feeding into like, DeSantis, and it’s impacting institutions of higher education. The colleges are being shut down or taken over. And so we’re always having to figure out new ways to be able to organize. And we’ve been having to use, like, popular education, just getting everyday people, like, “Here’s how you do a records request” so that we can then mobilize hundreds of people across multiple decentralized locations, putting in records request. And so we would hold those monthly weekly meetings of like, “Okay, where are you at on your records request?” And literally coaching one another through the, you know, Digital— Digital Coalition meetings to figure out how to problem solve because we don’t have the resources because we’re such a shoestring organization. But yeah, but I think Abbas is probably the expert in that area so I’ll toss it over there.

**Dr. Abbas Barzegar:** Yeah. I mean, again, I think the— I think the challenge really is, is understanding the constraints of institutional— institutional philanthropy. And so for everybody listening and everybody sort of involved in this space, the greatest learning that I’ve done is to understand that, you know, the organizations that we’re trying to help us in moving their, you know, their money in different ways, they manage, you know, hundreds of billions of dollars. And they function originally as fiduciary institutions. And so the kind of legal parameters that they operate in, the kind of policy parameters that they operate in are not advocacy parameters. I— we have the pleasure of working
with one client, one of the largest national DAF providers in the country. And I can say that with a resounding affirmation that the consensus at their staff and board level and executive level, their consensus is that they share the values that we’re espousing here, you know, this afternoon. However, they operate in an institutional capacity that doesn’t allow them to move. And so what they ask of us are clear definitions, clear guidelines, clear practices.

And what I would have to ask everybody else here is how far do we want to label, you know, those that are political rivals and social/cultural rivals as enemies? Okay? And this is a larger conversation about what democratic politics looks like today. But I’m increasingly becoming wary of the possibility that we, so to speak, are part of the polarizing problem that’s taking place in the way in which we talk about other communities and other organizations other institutions. And I think that we have to be able to delineate between what is absolutely fringe and out of bounds and what is— and what may be acceptable legal discourse that we disagree with radically and that we will fight in courts and that we will fight in political institutions, etc. But I don’t think that anybody has really solved that in the country yet. And you see that that impasse has created problems at the Supreme Court, it creates problems at school boards, it creates problems at state legislatures everywhere, because I don’t think that we’ve clearly demarcated some of these lines. And specifically what I’m referring to is the— is the ability—not the ability— it is the fight right now that’s taking place between between reli— freedom of religion, freedom of religious expression and gender, sexuality, identity, civil rights-based civil rights.

That is a discussion that’s sort of tearing apart the country in different ways. And I think that we have to be able to locate sort of what our advocacy positions, goals and ambitions are on that. And it’s one of the things that we work routinely with with foundations. And so I would— I would just— I would say that the challenges are logistical, of course. You know, they’re resource—you know, we have resourcing problems. But I do think that there’s a deeper challenge and that’s a strategy and sort of ideological challenge in terms of what we’re actually fighting for.

Aidan Orly: I will jump in or unless anyone has anything they want to respond to. But I guess— I guess before I open it to audience, I am curious to hear if any of you have an anecdote or example of a successful pushing back against right-wing or anti-democratic funding or a way to—or an important shift. Is there a— yeah, I mean, again, I think, you know, Jasmine and a couple others of us, you’ve talked about the work that you’ve done and ways that you’re pushing back and have pushed back. I’m curious if— if there’s anything else that comes to mind around— because it’s— it’s an enormous— it is an enormous challenge,
as you all are describing.

Dr. Abbas Barzegar: And I’ll share. I’ll share. Basically, there’s a— I can give you a very concrete case. There’s a group called Generations. It’s an online ministry out of— out of Elizabeth, Colorado. It’s outside of Colorado Springs, which is kind of the home of Focus on the Family and a number of other kinds of groups. And the sort of main figure behind this is a guy named Ted Swanson, who’s just completely off the— off the charts. I mean, the guy is close— you know, the rhetoric is very similar to what you might find at the... those guys are—it’s slipping my name right now. But the folks who used to— you know, those terrible folks who used to go and protest outside of— outside of funerals and things like this, if you recall them. So there was a community foundation that asked us to do an assessment on this group. And this is the process. If you can get in front of the funding institution and make a legitimate complaint and this is what happened, is that they had a donor advisor who wanted to donate to this organization. It just so happened that one of the staffers recognized the organization’s name and they asked us to conduct a kind of an assessment on it. And we gave a very neutral assessment. And it was a risk— sort of risk based assessment that this is what the organization says, this is what their beliefs are, this is what your foundation says, and this is what they and what you believe in. Do you want to continue funding it? And we just laid out that case on a case by case basis, they took it to the donor, they had a smart conversation with the donor. The donor rerouted the money. The donor said, “No, we didn’t realize. We thought were funding a home schooling institution.”

And we have— we have dozens of examples of this around the country where donors themselves may not necessarily realize what’s happening. We have other cases where a foundation takes a position, the donor doesn’t like it, and they close multimillion dollar accounts. Now, if a foundation is willing to take that risk— because a multimillion dollar account, it’s usually going to be somewhere in the $100,000 range of fees that they earn from that. Okay? So you’re asking the foundation to give up its funding, its own funding and revenue source. So we have to prepare that foundation for the comms strategy, for the outreach strategy, for the follow-up for the other kinds of stakeholders, we need to be able to bring donors to them. You know, so it’s multifaceted. But no, we’ve had many wins in that way. And I would say, yeah, we’ve had many wins in that way. And again, it just comes down to concrete research, sound sort of clear definition, a lot of transparency and a lot of documentation.

Jasmine Banks: Yeah. I mean, one, you know, the co-founders of Un-Koch My Campus would call George Mason University, like, their number one, their
battleground. And, you know, over the time of our organizing, one of our co-founders and a group of students who had done a lot of pressure campaigns on faculty, pressure campaigns on the governing bodies, were able to secure, you know, a gift excess— excuse me—a gift acceptance policy based on a model policy that our students wrote. But that first that had— it had to be organized with their— with the educators. Right? Like, the tenured staff had to go in first. Then the folks who had more and more risk had to be taken to apply pressure to the institution. But we have seen some success around model policy and ultimately asking universities to divest completely from Koch funding when they’re already in such intense places is, you know, it was a failing strategy which is why I pivoted us. And I moved us away from that initial strategy that I inherited from the co-founders. But model policies are something that are really, really popular with our organizers, the students and faculty, and they can be used to re— and rewritten to be appropriate to their sociopolitical context because a community college and its gift agreement is going to be very different than a Harvard’s gift agreements. And so we’ve coached and worked with folks around that.

Claire Provost: I have an— I have a quick anecdote, if I can jump in too, Aidan, if that’s okay. Yeah. So in terms of like this, also reflecting the different sources of funding that Christian Right anti-democratic movements have access to and have developed access to. There is a very— I live in Italy and there’s a very popular brand of prosecco in Italy in all the supermarkets. There’s a very— also very popular brand of cheese in all the supermarkets. I used to buy it. I used to buy both of them. And then after— when the World Congress of Families Network was hosted here in 2019, I uncovered in the course of my other investigations that both that prosecco company and that cheese company had given money to the World Congress of Families. And as a consumer, I didn’t know that. You know, there’s no— there’s no label on the bottle that says this, like, “Buy this and maybe some of your money is going to help sponsor a conference of hate groups”, you know? And it’s hard to tell directly that that’s what happened with my dollars buying the prosecco. But you know what I mean.

The financial connection is clear and it’s not made clear to the consumer. After we put that— after that story came out, there were calls for boycotts of those companies. And those companies are— they still exist. Their products still exist, but there are consumers that now know and don’t buy them as a result. So I think that’s maybe a success. But also an interesting anecdote, right? Because it shows, I think, the variety of sources of funding you wouldn’t necessarily think to look at like food companies and where they’re giving their donations to.
**Aidan Orly:** Totally. And that— yeah. Even just by buying something as simple as that is could be adding to the funding revenue stream. Thank you all for sharing. And I know, Ethan, you’ve also been part of some campaigns in Boston pushing, as you mentioned, the Unmasking Fidelity campaign. I don't know if there's anything from there that comes to mind or the— like, you’ve worked with the Amalgamated campaign either. But no— no pressure, but I just wanted to uplift that as also another campaign that is happening. Okay. I mean, I— I also— yeah, I want to— we have, you know, we'll go to a half hour for those who can stay. But I want to open it up to anyone who’s in the room if you have questions or if you also have experiences to share, you’ve done work on this or you are doing research around any of these topics. We'd love for you to to share or please ask your questions. We also collected some so I can also feed those as well. But I want to give the opportunity for folks to unmute and ask questions directly if you want to.

**Katie Harrison:** So I have a question. I’m Katie Harrison from Seattle. My question is about the ways in which those kinds of corporate boycotts that you were just describing around the prosecco and so forth, you know, a company like Hobby Lobby would be an excellent example of a company where that needs to take place. And now when people do those kinds of boycotts, you know, they’re called “woke” and various other things. I’m wondering if you have examples of— sort of counter examples that we can use when somebody, you know, is kind of decrying boycotts based on political positions and so forth. How is the Right using boycotts as part of their strategy?

**Claire Provost:** The Right definitely uses boycotts, right? I'm just thinking, automatically a couple comes to mind, like the boycotts against Disney, for example, you know, and the LGBT characters and diverse characters. And I guess if you think about it, if you think about the— like the ones I’m thinking of, that the Right organizes, they like, they’re not necessarily trying to organize everybody to boycott. They’re trying to organize their supporters to boycott. And it’s partly because maybe the boycott could send a message, could have influence.

But I think it’s also to mobilize that community. And so I think that might be something to think about on, like for progressive causes, too, is that, like, you might not end that funding stream, but you build consciousness and understanding of how like, we might be unintentionally funding attacks on our own rights. I mean, when I thought I mean, I wanted to go smash all the prosecco in the supermarkets, you know, it was like it’s— like it’s— I think it’s an important mobilizing thing, maybe within communities, too, also, and maybe
people who are not actively involved in progressive struggles, but who don't want to be inadvertently funding the Right and attacks on human rights and stuff. It could help bring maybe some of those people in too. Those are just some thoughts I have, but I'm not an organizer by experience as much as some others on the call, so I would like to know what Jasmine thinks.

**Jasmine Banks:** Thanks for tossing in my direction. Yeah, I mean, it was one of the first things that I picked up on was this very sophisticated way that the groups that share this constellation of donors were able to engage what Hirshman calls the rhetoric of reaction around like, “It’s perverse”, the like, perversity, futility, what’s the other one? Jeopardy! And so they would go through these narrative rhetorical cycles, right? So we had to counter that with different narrative frames, and then we had to organize people around it. We had to teach them how to tell that story, why it mattered. And then that was how we were able to build political power and will on the grassroots level to then have people implement something that may not— it may not currently impact them, but could impact other people. Right? So we would give— we would give alumni a different kind of message than what we gave students and organize the alumni to engage and press the levers of power in different ways, ultimately creating the conditions where it looked like the best and most favorable thing you could do is adopt a model policy where there is no conflict of interest and there's no donor control. Right? So those were one ways— one tactic that we utilized.

But really, as far as like the interpersonal human level, I think just having conversations with folks in the long term and doing deep intentional listening helps you really understand where people's underlying anxieties around this. Like when you say, “Well, what are you afraid of? What are you think is going to happen to you?”, right? That's where the populist fear comes out. And so being able to spend deep time in relational organizing is super important. When we learn— when we talk to Koch-funded professors, they were just like, “I just need money to do this beautiful thing that I want to do.” And we're like, “Oh, that’s legitimate. Like, that’s serious.” Like, so then what else can we do? How else can we organize in creative ways that advances belonging and cooperation and protecting these really critical institutions that we all love for various reasons, but we need to be a part of the fabric of our civil society.

And we just chose to be very adaptable with all of the ways that we organize. We don't choose one tactic. We have a whole toolbox and we make sure that we're thoughtful about getting to the “why” behind what is concerning folks. Providing that kind of care and not just using them in an extractive way where we say, “We just need you to make a mess at your university so we can get
this ideological thing achieved”, That’s not the Un-Koch My Campus that I’m running. It’s a very different approach. So hopefully that helped.

**Aidan Orly:** Yeah, I think that kind of gets— well. I mean, if— if anyone else has a follow up or wants to ask a question on that, I know that there’s a question from the chat that was around how progressive funders and progressive donors can undercut the financing of the Right and directly push back against it. Like, what is the role of like— elaborating on the role of progressive philanthropy and progressive donors in countering the effects or countering directly the funding streams from the Right? I just want to put that question out into the mix, but also open it up too, if anyone else wants to ask a question, please, please jump in.

**Vanessa Daniel:** I’d love to ask maybe the other side of that same coin. So maybe it matches. Is— you know, and particularly, Jasmine, I really appreciate your presentation and I’m curious your reflections, because there’s such strong, like lockstep alignment on the Right, even though there is, of course, like a diversity and a spectrum of views. But strength of the alignment on the Right, I’m wondering, I just would love to know your and anyone else on the panel’s reflections on the difficulty of achieving that level of alignment between— and I’m looking at your diagram with the universities and the think tanks and the front groups’ legislation and the donors. That whole cycle— and the elected politicians. And if you could wave a wand, what would you change about how progressive philanthropy operates in order to support rather than hinder effective alignment on our— on like, in a progressive direction?

**Jasmine Banks:** Yeah, that’s a really great question. Also. Hi. We’ve never met in real life, but I used to be a fangirl of yours.

**Vanessa Daniel:** Good to see you!

**Jasmine Banks:** So this is a complex question that other people have tried to answer and they thought the answer was “Build the same thing. Do your own universities, get your own think tanks, get your own policy people, and that’s what you’re doing.” And maybe this is too much of a philosophical answer and you’re asking more tactically, and please correct me if it doesn’t give you— it doesn’t satisfy you.

But what I love about how Charles Koch funds is he funds for the best of all possible worlds. And what happens on the— you know, the folks that I’ve been in relationship with as far as funders is they fund to avoid the worst possible
worlds. And there’s no world building, right? There’s no like, “Okay, when we deconstruct this thing called settler colonization, when we do the repair and the care to the enslaved African folks and the indigenous folks and the working poor and those who we have forgot as they enter our borders. And when we do that work, we’ll look around and like, ‘Well, what were y’all building when we were trying to deconstruct?’” And so that’s really, really hard. I have to work multiple jobs in order to not be on food stamps, running Un-Koch My Campus and I have four children. So the lack of investment of my—of an intervening in my material conditions has kept me from being able to scale on Koch and build this work in a way that was, you know, that was sustainable. And so that often leads people to these conditions where they’re given to reactionary messaging, they’re given to tactics that actually don’t work. They don’t have the time to do deep learning and listening and get with data experts and build out, right?

The reason why I have been so successful is because I come from a lineage and a tradition where I sit at the feet of my elders and some of my elders happen to be really fucking radical revolutionary people. But if I didn’t have that, I’d be out in these nonprofit streets making all kinds of mistakes more than I’ve already made. Right? And there’s a kind of principled struggle that exists for folks who fund on the Right that does not exist on the Left. Those people are not afraid of their wild-ass cousins and what their wild-ass cousins are saying to Tucker Carlson. But the Left will immediately be like, “Ooh, you’re not an expert. You’re not”—I went to John Brown University, a Christian evangelical liberal arts institute. I got— I graduated with honors from my Western civilization classes and my Old Testament classes. I was taught—and I don’t know how I ended up at this school, it’s a longer story—I was taught that we as Christians, were going to be grafted in the vine of David and one day go to Jerusalem. My wife’s best friend is the child of the Hobby Lobby billionaires. Okay, so I have lived inside of their ecosystem. I have learned to speak their language and survive. And you have to talk to those of us who have been so close to the problem. And then you also have to give us money and trust that we can organize, that we are self-determined and we have the right to defend ourselves.

Vanessa Daniel: Super helpful. Thank you.

Jasmine Banks: And then someone help us figure out how to report on it to the IRS so we don’t get shut down.

Katie Harrison: Well you know that that business about. Well, I don’t know how to put it into sound bites, but what you were just describing, I think, is
really, really important in terms of the Christian Right. Their souls are on the line. And that is a totally different construct than ours. And I am always completely flummoxed by that. I don’t know how to— I mean, if your soul is on the line, you’ve got a different sort of commitment. You’ve got a different degree of discipline. And, you know, we— well, we’re busy herding cats. So I just don’t know. It’s with the religious Right in particular that I feel so flummoxed.

**Jasmine Banks:** Well, it’s what Timothy Snyder calls the politics of eternity, right? Like, the free market and invisible hand has become the God and the religion. And now they’re on their Christian shoulders to protect their private power. Right? And so that can be a complicated thing. And it takes more than just policy or advocacy to break folks out of those echo chambers. You know, there are experts that contest the idea of contact theory for all kinds of reasons and ways. And I get that to a degree of like you— if you make contact with people who are different than you, you begin to transform. But I’m— my father was African-American. My mother was a White person with Belgian settler family members. And she was the first in line to marry a Black man after Loving v. Virginia allowed it to be legal for interracial marriage. And I think there’s something there, too, about whatever we’re doing with the generative world-building work that we’re funding has to include being in relationship with some of these people. I’m not talking about the ones who are truly— you know, want to kill my child and want to take her from my home. But the other folks that are part of those conversations and are still in relationship with these kind of projects that are operating.

**Kerstin Gleim:** Some of you have talked about the issue of— perhaps not being able to have some kind of coordinated effort to move towards what we want. But I wonder if there isn’t— if it’s a structural issue or a funding issue. Because why isn’t there a lot of left-leaning fund— a left-leaning money that wants a place to do something similar to what the Koch brothers have done for the right— right-wing efforts? So I would really like to be able to contribute to funding anyway, to the extent that I can, an effort that’s moving towards as opposed to fighting against. I’m not saying we can’t be fighting— that we don’t need to fight against, but I’m really interested in how we move forward to doing the things, organizing such that we get effective political change. My example is ALEC. I can’t remember what it stands for, but it’s— it has gotten state legislatures Republican. And why is it that the left-leaning money isn’t doing something similar to move state legislatures, or whatever focus we want, towards the more progressive direction? That’s my big question.
Dr. Abbas Barzegar: Aidan, is it okay if I jump in on that question?

Aidan Orly: Oh, yeah. Anyone can. Anyone is welcome to jump in.

Dr. Abbas Barzegar: I just want to take up too much mic time, so I'll try to make it quick. Again, this— the criticism that levvy here is is in good faith, you know, for, you know, community solidarity here. So please don't take my criticisms as disparaging in any way, in any way whatsoever. But my concern and my observations over the years, having been in the advocacy and sort of progressive philanthropy space and watching closely, is that the majority of our dollars, frankly, that are coming from foundations, that are being raised, are going towards very high publicity, high media profile types of activity, even the infrastructure type of funding that exists. So if it's not front line organizing, maybe there is funding that goes to build out sort of power-building movements and networks that would be considered infrastructure work.

The trajectory of that work is also forward-facing and media-facing. The output is— the goal is to generate media publicity, to field candidates, and to hold office. But the actual technocratic, bureaucratic infrastructure that's needed to combat or rival groups like ALEC, the money does not exist for that. Okay? It doesn't exist because it doesn't fit a narrative change strategy. And most of our funders and most of our institutions are obsessed with narrative change. Okay? And not actually investing in the kind of technocratic, bureaucratic infrastructure that's needed to challenge or even rival some of these institutions. And so I consider, you know, Horizon Forum to be an example of the kind of technocratic solution and our theory of change is to stay outside of the media publicity as far as possible because it threatens the integrity of the work itself. If the Far Right were to find out what we're doing, they would— they would destroy what we do and it would make it very difficult to proceed. However, it's very difficult to find resources for that kind of work. However, on every level, whether you're trying to get folks to divest, whether you're trying to get them to, you know, kind of reexamine their policies, both on the investment side as well as the grantmaking side, you need quiet— the quiet technocratic sort of solutions in spaces. And it just— it's antithetical to the grand strategy, I think, of the Left. And so there's a rupture there. And so funders have to take a close look at what they're funding, what their— what their out— what their goals are.

Final word is that folks like the Koch brothers operate on a multigenerational timeline. Okay? And like somebody said, some folks are operating on a transcendental timeline, right? So dealing with a completely different calculus than trying to stay up on the 48 hour news cycle. Okay? It's a completely
different ballgame.

Claire Provost: I would also say it’d be a really scary world if progressive funders start doing exactly what conservative funders do, because that includes like fighting transparency, looking for ways to avoid regulations, and then doing things that undermine not just rights, but can also be illegal or borderline illegal, if not full on illegal. And so, you know, some of the stuff that we saw U.S. Christian Right organizations doing overseas was, you know, very much either borderline illegal or flat out illegal. And so— and then that layered with an amount of financial secrecy that, like, progressive organizations don't have. And it’s good that they don't have it. And so yeah. It's a challenging question because the one hand the fight doesn't seem fair. On the other hand, some of the tactics are ones you would not want to adopt. Because they're anti-democratic themselves.

Myron Miller: I wonder, given what Abbas just said and what several people have said, whether there's a real communications gap in this progressive or left-leaning strategy, that the Right wing is very, very effective at getting the message out or getting training out of what’s going on and how to participate. And so many of the things that we’ve said in the last 15 minutes suggest that there isn't enough understanding among potential progressive funders. And I think that’s a pretty broad range of foundations and other funders who would be willing to get invested if they understood better what some of these constraints are. I just don't feel that it's talked about or explained sufficiently to get the broad range of funders who are somewhat left-leaning to understand where they might put the money.

Jasmine Banks: Thank you for that, that comment, elder. In my case, in my generation and how I came into political consciousness and awareness, it was an issue of disinformation. The messages from like neoliberal folks were getting to me, like, in high school. I was convinced that Sarah Palin was a feminist and I was pro-Sarah Palin and turned my back on my whole family's legacy and lineage and lived reality. So it was about— like, it was in my school curriculum. It was on the TV shows that I was watching. And I didn't have enough access to information to be able to counter the disinformation that was a deluge. So I was given easily to certain ideas that I believed wholeheartedly and would organize and like, bet my days around. Right? And so I think there’s a little piece there around communication, but there’s also a piece there around like how we educate folks on the Left.  

Like, I talk to young people all the time and have to convince them that
governance can be good and it's worthwhile. I have, you know, 16, 17 year old, eight year old folks that I have to literally, you know, I think I'm probably a bit far left on the spectrum, but I will have to be, like, defending liberal democracy before we can even get to other conversations, because they think that it's a bad thing. And I— you know, I'm not a political scientist. I understand the nuances of all kinds of political, like, global movements. And if young people don't even believe that good governance can be possible in this country, then we get that— like they go to these other places that provide them safety and security and care, because so many people are so afraid of what is happening when the violence in their communities, when they can't feed their families. And so a lot of these ideas, ideologies that are being really well funded have good stories of how you stay safe. And fear in our young species is such an activating emotion. It leads people to do all kinds of things. And again, it leads us to do the kind of things that make some of the worst possible worlds.

But messages that don't activate our fight or flight reflex, messages that actually show nuance and complexity and belonging give us a different kind of physiological experience and hold us longer there. And so when we're activating people based on a shared threat versus on a shared project that we can build together, you get different outcomes. And so much of the funding on the Left has been like, horror and terror and “Oh my gosh, things are so bad and if you don't take action now, if you don't donate right now”— panic, panic, panic! When you couple that with people who have already lived through genocide, already lived through all kinds of other horrors, that creates a kind of toxic stew that we are now swimming in here in this place in space. What Abbas talked about naming that polarization. So hopefully that also added to what you've been thinking about, Mr. Miller.

Aidan Orly: I regret having to cut this conversation short and think that that was also really powerful way to end the conversation. Thank you, Jasmine, and all of our speakers for bringing so much. You know, this is just scratching the surface of the conversation, but it felt so rich and it felt very like, whole. At least for me. And I am taking a lot of learnings that I am excited to think more on and this is also not the full end of the conversation.

We will be having a second part of this that will build upon the “What can we do” about pushing back against right-wing funding extremism and what we’re building towards. That will be on April 20th at the same time. Thursday, April 28th, 4 PM Eastern, 1 PM Pacific and U.S. time, of course. And then— but I just— huge, huge shout out and thank you to the speakers, again; To my team at PRA for holding down the tech and the chat and for all of you for being here with with us, bringing your questions, to chat, and just spending your afternoon.
in this conversation. So with that, I hope you all have a nice rest of your day, your evening, your night, wherever it is you are, and we will hopefully see you on April 20th for that part two.