Customize appearance

Dark Money-Fueled Group Strategizes To Target Dem Voting Blocs

IMAGE CREDIT CLAY BANKS/UNSPLASH

In 2015, the Wyss Foundation — a project of Swiss billionaire Hansjorg Wyss — put forth a plan to "fundamentally change the composition of the [American] electorate" in a way that another leaked memo indicated would help "achieve the foundation's policy goals." Last week, one of the organizations the Wyss Foundation channels money to held a conference plotting how to do just that.

The Wyss Foundation's plan, mapped to run from 2015 to 2020 and projected to cost $105 million to $210 million, aimed to "reshape the electorate in as many states as possible" by expanding voter registration. A follow-up memo indicated these efforts would be directed at "low-income populations who tend to be reliably progressive" such as "[u]nmarried women, youth, and people of color."

At its 15th annual State Summit in Washington, D.C., last week, left-wing nonprofit America Votes brought together public officials and activists to strategize about reaching just such voters. The conference included discussions about how to "create more lifelong voters" from a "diverse coalition" that, based on the conference topics, includes college students, pro-abortion voters, anti-Second Amendment activists, LGBT activists, racial minorities, and "progressive Christians."

America Votes received $129 million from the Sixteen Thirty Fund, a branch of left-wing dark money group Arabella Advisors, in 2020, according to InfluenceWatch. In turn, the Sixteen Thirty Fund received more than $135 million from a political action branch of the Wyss Foundation, with which it has close ties, from 2016 to 2020, The New York Times reported.

Registering a New 'Progressive Majority' to Vote

The conference agenda, posted online, highlights "expanding voter registration" as a "critical component of presidential years, which represent the best opportunity to further grow the electorate, and create more lifelong voters over a four-year cycle." The goal is to "maximize" that opportunity "over the next eight months by investing in programs to grow the electorate."

Speakers focused on mobilizing the voters that became active since Donald Trump ran for the presidency in 2016.

One question on the agenda posed: "In 2024, how can organizers expand the electorate, harness the power of the newly motivated surge voter, leverage opportunities to 'spread out the vote,' and maintain high support from our diverse coalition for pro-democracy candidates?"

The focus on such a coalition seems to come straight out of the Wyss plan, which took inspiration from research by the New Organizing Institute, the since-defunct precursor to the Center for Tech and Civic Life, which boosted Democrat turnout in 2020 by funneling millions in private dollars from tech billionaire Mark Zuckerberg to election offices.

Interestingly, senior officials of the Wyss Foundation discussed their plan with John Podesta in March 2015, just a month after he stepped down as counselor to President Barack Obama, according to emails revealed by Wikileaks. A memo from the Wyss Foundation to Podesta, sent several days after the initial plan was completed, emphasized more specific aims of such a program: using lawfare and advocacy to "remove barriers" in voting laws, establishing "permanent government-based registration systems," and getting large service providers to register their clients.

"If low-income people voted at the same rate as high-income people, it would be easier to achieve the foundation's policy goals," the memo stated. "In the short-term, highly-targeted (but relatively expensive) strategies could be used to increased registration — and ultimately participation — by the emerging progressive majority, closing the voting gap faster and substantially advancing the foundation's policy agenda."

One of the ways the America Votes conference discussed growing this "progressive majority" was by "campus organizing" and turning young voters against Trump.

"With many polls now showing lower levels of engagement and enthusiasm among younger voters," the agenda reads, "what are effective issues and strategies for re-engaging youth communities in 2024 as a force against MAGA nationally and down-ballot?"

Appealing to Democrat Special Interest Groups

In addition to emphasizing voter registration efforts, the conference catered to a smattering of left-leaning interest groups. Topics included abortion, gun control, and the supposed threat of "extremism," "fascism," and "Christian Nationalism."

Notable speakers on the agenda included Michigan Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson, AFL-CIO President Elizabeth Shuler, Building Back Together Executive Director Maya Macias, Democrat Rep. Maxwell Frost, Amanda Trump of the Democratic Attorney Generals Association, and Kelly Byrne-Martin of the Democratic Legislative Campaign Committee.

Benson, who worked with the National Vote at Home Institute to change state voting rules in 2020, was slated to join a panel discussing how Trump "has told us he will be a 'dictator on day one' with plans for pardoning insurrectionists, sanctioning a national abortion ban, and establishing detention camps."

At the conference, America Votes presented its "2024 Cecile Richards Progressive Leader Award" — named for the former Planned Parenthood president — to Minnesota's Democrat trifecta.

"The travesty of the *Dobbs* decision has wrought devastating consequences in MAGA-controlled states across the country," reads a summary of a discussion about abortion. "Since *Roe* was overturned, abortion is now *LITERALLY* on the ballot in most states."

The conference included a section on so-called "extremism" directed against the LGBT movement, labeling its opposition as threats.

"Extremists are threatening our communities and democracy at every level of government and society," the agenda claims, blaming conservatives for "spreading the 'big lie' threatening freedom and safety of the LGBTQ+ people at state capitals, and sowing mistrust and division in attempting dominance over local school boards to ban books and erase history."

America Votes hosted anti-gun speakers including Angela Ferrell-Zabala, executive director of Moms Demand Action, and Monisha Henley, senior vice president of government affairs of Everytown for Gun Safety, to discuss "the generational shift away from MAGA Republicans' gun rights extremism."

Other speakers discussed what they considered the rise of "fascism," which the agenda claims is "knocking on America's door."

One discussion focused on mobilizing "Progressive Christians" against what the agenda labeled "Christian Nationalism." Discussing "the threat from the Christian Far Right," the panel sought to answer questions like "Christian Nationalists are a growing force in the MAGA GOP, but are they just a loud, vocal minority?"

America Votes partners with groups including Planned Parenthood, Building Back Together, the Democratic Association of Secretaries of State, and — notably — the Center for Secure and Modern Elections. According to InfluenceWatch, CSME is a project of The New Venture Fund, one of the same Arabella Advisors network as the Sixteen Thirty Fund. It also shares close ties with CTCL.

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