



## Who Is Funding the Anti-Streetcar Effort?

Ald. Bauman and others are certain that dark money is pouring in for this, which streetcar opponents deny.

By [Bruce Murphy](#)

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If you believe Ald. **Bob Bauman**, some sneaky conservative group is spending millions to pay for the anti-streetcar campaign, which is seeking signatures to demand a referendum. “I’ve heard estimates of \$1 million to as high as \$5 million,” Bauman says. He speculates that the conservative [Wisconsin Club for Growth](#) or [Bradley Foundation](#) could be helping to fund the effort. Others point to the Koch Brothers, always a popular candidate for liberal ire.

[Chris Kliesmet](#) of the [Citizens for Responsible Government](#), which is overseeing the petition drive, laughs at all this, calling it “unhinged ravings.” He says there has been “no funding yet nor on the horizon. Of course, we haven’t spent more than a few thousand to date, mostly on halls (for rallies) and (photocopying) petitions.”

CRG, however, did get pro bono legal help — of an unknown value — from the Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty, as Urban Milwaukee [has reported](#). That group, in turn, is bankrolled by the Bradley Foundation, whose most recent annual report shows a \$500,000 contribution to the Institute for Law & Liberty.

The foundation report also shows it contributed \$170,000 to the MacIver Institute, whose president [Brett Healy](#) led the effort pushing the state Public Service Commission, in a completely unprecedented decision, to force the city to pay for the costs of utility relocation, which raised the price tag on the streetcar project. And the MacIver Institute also has connections to the Koch Brothers, as Source Watch [has reported](#). The Koch-funded Cato Institute did [a study](#) for MacIver calling the Milwaukee Streetcar effort a scam.

Koch Industries is heavily involved in oil and gas production, and the two brothers have gotten involved in local campaigns to stop transit. An anti-transit campaign in Nashville [was funded by the Koch Brothers](#) and the advocacy group they fund, the Americans for Prosperity. The Americans for Prosperity also [fought mass transit in Indiana](#) and opposed the streetcar in San Antonio.

But there is little evidence such money is pouring into Milwaukee to pay for the anti-streetcar effort. The CRG's rally on Saturday at the Elks Lounge at 55th and Good Hope, looks like it had a low turnout, to judge by the videos posted (Kliesmet claims at least 200 people showed up). There has been little publicity for the effort and no paid ads I can see. Then there's the fact that the petition drive was launched so late that it [has little chance of succeeding](#). Frankly, the effort may not look like a good investment for the Koch Brothers or anyone else.

The turnout for the rally Saturday was almost all white (and older) faces, suggesting the ongoing campaign to build streetcar opposition within the minority community may not be bearing much fruit. One effort in that regard has been the [radio ads that ran on WNOV](#) featuring **Nate Hamilton**, the brother of [Dontre Hamilton](#), who was killed by a police officer at Red Arrow Park.

Hamilton in his message, complains that "[Tom Barrett](#)'s precious trolley gets the fast track... yet justice for our people is at a stand-still." He then goes on to suggest people send a message to Barrett and Milwaukee County D.A. [John Chisholm](#) (who declined to press charges against the police officer who killed Dontre Hamilton) by opposing the streetcar.

But how would stopping the streetcar send a message to Chisholm? The D.A. has absolutely nothing to do with the streetcar and has never expressed an opinion on it. The ads were paid for by Republican PR operative [Craig Peterson](#), who says he paid "out of my pocket" for the ads because he cares about the city and believes the money being spent on the streetcar could be better spent on other forms of transit.

It's worth noting, however, that Peterson has done work for **Erik O'Keefe**, head of the conservative #Wisconsin Club for Growth#. Last summer, Peterson introduced O'Keefe to a number of influential Milwaukeeans in an effort to stoke opposition to Chisholm, says a source who met with the two of them. O'Keefe has been [an implacable enemy](#) of Chisholm, ever since the DA launched a John Doe probe of allegedly illegal connections between the campaigns of Gov. [Scott Walker](#) and conservative groups like the Club for Growth. O'Keefe has filed a series of lawsuits against Chisholm and the other Doe investigators. O'Keefe's Club for Growth also was interested in working together with black activists in the city to launch a recall against Chisholm. That's something that *would* have sent a message to the DA.

## Short Takes

-In his speech at anti-streetcar rally, Ald. **Joe Davis**, who has announced he will run against Mayor Barrett in 2016, seemed to address Bauman's claim that the streetcar opposition is more about trying to undercut Barrett's reelection effort. "Some people may say this is about the mayoral race," Davis noted. "That's wrong."

-While some [business folks have come out in favor of the streetcar](#), the business community is clearly divided on the streetcar. “Our membership lacks a clear consensus on the streetcar, ranging from strong support to concerns over this investment,” Metro Milwaukee Association of Commerce President [Tim Sheehy](#) told the [Shepherd Express](#).

-Former [City Clerk Ron Leonhardt](#) offered a comment after my [story](#) which argued the streetcar referendum effort is unlikely to succeed. He notes that once the petitions asking for a referendum are submitted, the City Clerk must review each and every signature and certify that the petitioners have the minimum number of valid signatures and meet all the other statutory requirements for petitions of this sort. This can take several days or more, especially if a legal opinion is needed from the City Attorney. Then, at the next Council meeting, an ordinance would be introduced to establish this referendum requirement. The City Charter forbids an ordinance being adopted at the same meeting that it is introduced. Instead, the ordinance would be referred to committee and could not return to the full Council until the next Council meeting in February, at the earliest.”

If it takes until February for the Council to vote on whether to have a referendum, and if a majority vote no, as they have in the past, then it must go before the voters to decide if a referendum should be required for any city spending of more than \$20 million on a rail transit project. But by law, there must be 70 days before the next election, which would rule out the April election. This would move the referendum to the February 2016 election. And if voters okayed the provision requiring a referendum for any such rail project, then such a referendum giving voters a chance to approve or deny the spending would be held in the next election. This moves the whole thing to the spring or fall of 2016.