

JEZEBEL

Rebekah Mercer Is Full of S***

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This Wednesday, in a Valentine's Day gift to campaign finance nerds the world over, Rebekah Mercer, the mysterious daughter of mysterious billionaire Robert Mercer, wrote a short essay for the *Wall Street Journal* responding to unspecified "sensational fantasies" and "absurd smears." It is, essentially, a press release from an inconceivably wealthy and powerful person who has almost entirely avoided direct scrutiny from the press, and as you would expect of a press release, it is bullshit where it isn't nonsense, and nonsense where it isn't bullshit.

For example:

I believe in a kind and generous United States, where the hungry are fed, the sick are cared for, and the homeless are sheltered. All American citizens deserve equality and fairness before the law. All people should be treated with dignity and compassion. I support a United States that welcomes immigrants and refugees to apply for entry and ultimately citizenship. I reject as venomous and ignorant any discrimination based on race, gender, creed, ethnicity or sexual orientation.

It may be that Mercer wouldn't describe herself as actively in favor of hunger or people dying in the streets; even so, no one who has spent millions of dollars supporting Steve Bannon, Ted Cruz, Donald Trump, and Milo Yiannopoulos can seriously claim to "reject" discrimination. (More on that shortly.)

As a federalist, I believe that power should be decentralized, with those wielding it closely accountable to the people they serve. There is obviously a role for the federal government. But I support a framework within which citizens from smaller political entities—states, counties, cities, towns and so on—can determine the majority of the laws that will govern them. Society's problems will never be solved by expensive, ineffective and inflexible federal programs.

This is hardly even worth addressing. Mercer is simply describing the political structure of the United States, which she supports to the extent of not apparently wanting to mount an armed insurrection against it, as well as saying that ineffective federal programs don't work—which is true enough, though effective ones have solved plenty of society's problems. More generally, this sort of palaver about decentralized power should, when coming from the heiress to a multi-billion dollar fortune, be taken with a grain of salt. It is, at bottom, just a fancy way of invoking "states' rights," which is itself just a fancy way of saying that the profit motive and its attendant bigotries should be allowed to run rampant across humanity.

I am deeply committed to research and the scientific method. I have degrees from Stanford in biology, mathematics, and operations research and engineering economic systems. I believe that genuine scientific discovery flourishes only in an atmosphere of dispassionate, open-minded

inquiry, with research evaluated according to neutral, evidence-based criteria. I oppose politicized science, in which researchers cannot study certain subjects—or even ask certain questions—for fear of career-ending backlash and persecution.

Since 2010, the Mercers have funded Art Robinson, founder of the climate science-denying Oregon Institute of Science and Medicine and a former candidate for Congress who once asked voters for urine samples, to the tune of \$1.6 million. In December 2016, Robinson joined the board of directors of the Heartland Institute, a climate science-denying think tank that has received at least \$2.8 million in Mercer money since 2012.

Heartland is but one of a slew of Mercer-supported think tanks and foundations that oppose climate change legislation, largely by undermining climate science: Rebekah herself recently joined the board of the Heritage Foundation, to which her family has given at least \$1.5 million since 2013, and which called the Paris agreement an “open door for egregious regulation, cronyism and government spending that would have been . . . disastrous for the American economy.” The science director of the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank to which the Mercers have given at least \$600,000 since 2014, said in a statement that the Paris Agreement was “climatically insignificant.”

I support ideas and policies, not individual politicians as people.

According to FEC filings, Robert and Rebekah Mercer gave just over \$23 million in donations to Republican candidates and to political-action committees during the 2016 election cycle. They initially threw their ample support behind Ted Cruz, pouring \$13.5 million into a network of super PACs supporting the senator, before switching their allegiance to Trump and dumping another \$2.5 million into the campaign. It was reportedly at Rebekah’s behest that Steve Bannon and Kellyanne Conway joined the Trump campaign and later the Trump administration.

I own a minority stake in Breitbart News (where I have no editorial authority) because I believe it adds an important journalistic voice to the American conversation. Stephen Bannon, its former chairman, took Breitbart in the wrong direction. Now that Mr. Bannon has resigned, Breitbart has the opportunity to refine its message and expand its influence.

Right or wrong, the direction that Bannon took Breitbart in was one that Rebekah herself helped set; what is more, few individuals exemplify the direction that Bannon took Breitbart in better than Milo Yiannopoulos, whom Rebekah reportedly “loves.” From about 2011 until very recently, the Mercers served as Bannon’s and Yiannopoulos’s principal patrons. They funded, for example, not only Breitbart but other organizations from which Bannon took a salary, such as his production company, Glittering Steel, or the nonprofit Government Accountability Institute, to which the Mercers have donated at least \$3.7 million since 2013. Rebekah is “is highly engaged with Breitbart’s content,” the New Yorker’s Jane Mayer reported last year, and “often points out areas of coverage that she thinks require more attention.” Her attention to editorial detail apparently extends to calling about typos, generally not something investors in media companies do.

I have chosen to involve myself with important policy issues, and with some of the institutions that discuss them, because I am, first and foremost, a mother. I am raising my children to be humble, productive citizens who will treat all people with dignity, respect and empathy. I want them to accept personal responsibility and to be aware that they alone will have to answer for

their choices and actions. I hope that my children will show stoicism and perseverance through adversity, as well as an ability to think for themselves and challenge conventional wisdom when necessary.

I'm glad that Rebekah brought up her children, because this provides an opportunity to discuss one of my pet obsessions, which is the question of whether Rebekah Mercer is an evangelical Christian, and if she is not, why she spends so much money supporting political projects that evangelical Christians also support.

According to Politico, Rebekah's four children are homeschooled. This is, of course, not a practice exclusive to evangelicals, but it is nevertheless extremely dear to them. (So is the euphemistically phrased "school choice," which provides opportunities to inculcate children into the ongoing culture wars, and also to beat them.) The Mercers' old friend Art Robinson, for example, offers a homeschooling curriculum that denies the theory of evolution and impels parents to "Teach your children to teach themselves and to acquire superior knowledge as did many of America's most outstanding citizens in the days before socialism in education."

In addition to Robinson, the Mercers have provided monetary support to more secular (or secular-seeming) proponents of homeschooling: The family foundation has given at least \$1.3 million to charter schools like Success Academy and affiliated advocacy groups since 2014, and while the Heartland Institute may be better known for its climate denial, it is also a strong supporter of the "school choice" agenda. Meanwhile, since 2014, the Mercer Family Foundation has given at least \$600,000 to King's College in Manhattan. Previously located in the Empire State Building, King's College has since moved downtown to the Financial District. "The college's mandate," the New York Times reported in 2008, "is to encourage students to engage people with differing viewpoints, and ideally to shape public discourse 'in a way that is winsome, and not screechy from the Christian right.'" Rebekah sits on the college's Council of Regents.

I also hope that they will embrace debate as a vital part of human progress. I am devoted to protecting individual rights to ensure that my children will mature in a country where they cannot be persecuted or imprisoned or have their livelihoods destroyed because of their thoughts and beliefs.

Rebekah installed David Barton, a prolific evangelical and homophobic propagandist, to run the family's super PAC network in the fall of 2016. Last year, Barton claimed on his radio program that gay people are the reason that health care costs are so high. "The most expensive cost for healthcare in America per person is not seniors, it's not those who live to be 100 years old," he said. "The most expensive health care cost in America right now, by far, individually, is for homosexuals. They cost more in the system than any other, hands down."

Barton also thinks that white people don't get enough credit for ending slavery. "You've also got the situation where that the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments, they're voted for—they're all civil rights amendments, but guess what? The only guys that could vote back then were white guys," he added. "You've got two-thirds of the whites in Congress and the majority of the whites in three-fourths of the states that said, 'You know what? We white guys want to tie our hands and make sure that blacks have the same rights that we do.' It's whites that were doing that. You never hear anything about that."

As my family and I know firsthand, America is now a society that threatens, pillories, and harms those who dare to question the status quo.

On Thursday, Democrats and Republicans in the House of Representatives voted to eviscerate the Americans with Disabilities Act, condemning yet another swathe of Americans to second-class citizenship, humiliation, and likely death; meanwhile, Rebekah and her family stand to reap the rewards of the \$1 trillion tax cut passed by Donald Trump and the GOP-controlled Congress. They'll be fine.