

AlterNet / By Sarah Jaffe

## 6 Shady Right-Wing Groups Pouring Money Into Today's Wisconsin Recall

*As Wisconsin progressives fight to recall Scott Walker's allies in the state senate, here are some of the conservative groups funding their right-wing agenda.*

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Photo Credit: AFP

Today will see the recall elections of six Wisconsin state senators who supported Republican Governor Scott Walker's budget cuts, and specifically his attacks on the right of workers to bargain collectively.

The state has become a focal point for national politics, pitting Democrats—14 of whom fled the state in order to stall a vote on the union-busting bill—against Republicans, who with Tea Party support have been enacting Shock Doctrine-style slash and burn policies instead of delivering the promised jobs to the state's workers.

In a foretaste of what Election 2012 will look like, the recalls have shattered spending records on both sides. Mike McCabe from the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign **estimated** \$31 million had been spent already—nearly 10 times the \$3.75 million spent on all the state races in 2010. But

more importantly, they've seen a flood of so-called "dark money" from groups that don't have to disclose their donors thanks to the *Citizens United* ruling.

With all the interest from outside of the state, it's natural that political groups on a national scale have poured money and volunteers into the election. Progressive organizations like the Progressive Change Campaign Committee, Democracy for America and women's groups like Emily's List are buying ads and recruiting volunteers to make phone calls for the Democratic challengers in the six recall districts.

But as McCabe noted, the difference is in the disclosure. While, as [Greg Sargent at the Washington Post](#) pointed out, this has rightly been labor's fight since the beginning, the sudden influx of conservative groups from all over the country means a lot of untraceable money. Here are six of the groups putting their money on the line in hopes of Republican victories.

### **1. Club for Growth**

According to Greg Sargent, Club for Growth Wisconsin has pumped at least \$1.5 million into the recalls, \$400,000 of it just in support of Alberta Darling, the powerful co-chair of the legislature's Joint Finance Committee.

So who are they?

"The Club" markets itself as a sort of free-market fanclub. [Its website](#) says "Club for Growth is a national network of thousands of pro-growth Americans, from all walks of life, who believe that prosperity and opportunity come through economic freedom."

Its political action committee pushes for lower taxes, "school choice" (code for privatization), candidates who support a flat tax, deregulation, tort reform, and "free" trade. Founded in 1999 by a group including Cato Institute president Ed Crane and *National Review* president Dusty Rhodes, Club for Growth helped elect Scott Walker (R.J. Johnson was a campaign adviser for Walker and now is an adviser to the Club). Before recalls were even a question, the [Club aired ads](#) in the state in favor of Walker's union-busting bill.

Johnson has repeatedly refused to disclose where the club gets its funding.

## 2. ALEC

If you want to find the source of many of the conservative proposals put forward in Wisconsin and around the country, you need look no further than the American Legislative Exchange Council, which Wisconsin Democratic State Rep. [Mark Pocan](#) called “much like a dating service, only with legislators and special interests.” Pocan attended the ALEC meeting in New Orleans recently, wrote for the *Progressive*, “It matches them up, builds a relationship, culminates with the birth of special interest legislation and ends happily ever after. That’s happy for the special corporate interests, that is.”

As [Common Cause](#) reported:

“In Wisconsin, the \$304,607 leading ALEC companies put into 2010 campaigns was felt far beyond Gov. Walker’s anti-union budget initiatives. State legislators also agreed this year to cap – along lines suggested by ALEC -- the “punitive” damages that can be assessed in personal injury lawsuits. The caps could save millions of dollars for ALEC’s corporate members. And despite pleas from consumer groups, Wisconsin lawmakers voted to deregulate the telecommunications industry, also along lines promoted by ALEC.”

Scott Walker was an active ALEC member when he was a legislator, and so are a couple of the senators up for recall. Is it any wonder they've gotten money from the ALEC corporations? Alberta Darling has gotten \$10,205 in direct donations since 2000, and Randy Hopper \$4,294. And that's just the money that can be traced—finding the money coming from ALEC member companies like Wal-Mart, Coca-Cola, AT&T and Koch Industries is much harder, thanks to new disclosure rules after *Citizens United*.

## 3. Wisconsin Family Action

According to the [Center for Media and Democracy](#), Wisconsin Family Action has spent \$500,000 on the recalls thus far. The group, formerly a small religious right organization that opposes abortion and same-sex marriage as well as pornography, gambling and taxes, has now teamed up with bigger corporate groups. [Adele Stan](#) reported that misleading absentee ballots with the wrong return date also had directions to mail them back to Wisconsin Family Action's headquarters.

The Center for Media and Democracy noted, though, that the ads being run by WFA in the recalls make little mention of the social issues they support, and instead focus on, for instance, Democrat Fred Clark's driving record.

[The Wisconsin Gazette](#), an LGBT newspaper, reported that Wisconsin political veterans are surprised about the amount of money WFA suddenly has to put into election spending. Wisconsin Democratic Party chairman Mike Tate told them:

“All of a sudden this little, tiny anti-gay outfit becomes a major player on the political scene? Come on. They’ve become a front group for somebody’s dirty cash.”

Though there's no way to know where that money comes from, the *Gazette* speculates it might be coming from Focus on the Family—or from the Kochs.

#### **4. American Federation for Children**

[Betsy DeVos](#) is the chair of the [American Federation for Children](#)—and the sister of Erik Prince, founder of Blackwater, the infamous private security firm. She also served as chair of the Michigan Republican Party and finance chair of the National Republican Senatorial Committee. Her husband Dick DeVos is co-founder of Amway, and through a [network of family foundations](#) (the Richard and Helen DeVos foundation, the Dick and Betsy DeVos foundation) gives away a lot of money to conservative Christian organizations like Focus on the Family, the Foundation for Traditional Values, and the Traditional Values Coalition.

The American Federation for Children touts itself as a “school choice” organization. “School choice” advocates support federal dollars going to private and religious schools through taxpayer-funded vouchers—in other words, it's all about privatizing education, with some nice words thrown in about low-income children being able to go to posh schools.

According to the [Wisconsin Democracy Campaign](#):

“This organization spent an estimated \$820,000 on independent expenditures and phony issue ad activity in the 2010 fall legislative races. The group is an offshoot of the Michigan-based [All Children Matter](#) which spent an estimated \$2.5 million on phony issue ad activity in legislative races from 2004 through 2008, and in the 2006 governor’s race.”

## 5. Faith Family Freedom

Another of the social conservative groups jumping into what was supposedly an economic fight, the Faith Family Freedom Fund is a political action committee controlled by the Family Research Council, which was founded in 1983 by James Dobson and is now headed by Tony Perkins. In 2010, the Southern Poverty Law Center designated the FRC a [hate group](#).

The FRC first got involved in Wisconsin's Supreme Court election earlier this year, supporting incumbent (and eventual winner) David Prosser against Democratic challenger JoAnne Kloppenburg. Josh Harkinson at *Mother Jones* noted:

“The FRC's anti-labor campaign in Wisconsin is part of its larger agenda to meld fiscal conservatism with its family-values message. Its recent priorities have included fighting health care reform, new taxes on the wealthy, and President Obama's budget proposals.”

The [Faith Family Freedom Fund](#) is buying radio ads on Christian and talk radio in support of Dan Kapanke, one of the six Republicans being recalled.

## 6. Americans for Prosperity

Americans for Prosperity is the 900-pound gorilla of the front groups in Wisconsin. It has shelled out [over \\$240,000](#) for TV ads alone, and also sent out absentee ballots telling citizens to return them two days after the election date.

AFP is the main front group for billionaire brothers David and Charles Koch and one of the biggest backers of the Tea Party movement. [Andy Kroll at Mother Jones](#) noted that the union-busting bill that launched Wisconsin's protest movement “is right out of the Koch brothers' playbook,” and that their money helped greatly in putting him in office in the first place.

Like many of the big-money corporate groups, AFP has been [involved in Wisconsin](#) politics since before the 2010 elections, and has been accused of shady dealings behind the elections of Walker and Senator Ron Johnson, who defeated progressive champion Russ Feingold. AFP launched a [\\$342,000 ad campaign](#) in support of Walker's union-busting bill, and is now fighting hard to keep Republicans in control of the state senate.

Walker is so indebted to the Kochs that he **accepted a call** from a blogger posing as David Koch, and bragged about his union-busting skills, comparing himself to Ronald Reagan and his move to Reagan's busting of the air traffic controllers' union.

Alberta Darling in particular is a recipient of the Kochs' largesse—she's received a 100 percent rating from Americans for Prosperity, according to the *Wisconsin Gazette*, and Kelly Steele of *We Are Wisconsin* **told that paper**, “Darling has unlimited money,” via Koch. “There are outside resources that are going to come in for her in unlimited fashion.”