



Trump Megadonors and Business Execs Are Bankrolling QAnon-Friendly Candidates

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The FBI labeled the QAnon conspiracy theory a domestic terrorism threat in May 2019. But that hasn't prevented members of the House Freedom Caucus, gun rights organizations, and a number of prominent Republican Party donors and business executives from donating to QAnon-friendly congressional candidates.

The primary QAnon theory imagines President Donald Trump as a selfless savior waging a secret war against a child sex trafficking ring led by his political enemies, including Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama. Eventually, Trump will conduct a military takeover and arrest Democrats en masse.

The bizarre theories emerged from the related “Pizzagate” conspiracy theory — that a D.C. pizza restaurant was the headquarters of a child trafficking operation run by Clinton and her associate John Podesta. QAnon proponents often assert that John F. Kennedy, Jr. faked his own death in 1999 and is a faithful Trump supporter.

The theories have led to real-life crime — by the theorists. A North Carolina man angered by the bogus Pizzagate story drove up to Washington and entered the restaurant, Comet Ping Pong, with an assault rifle that he discharged, for which he was sentenced to four years in prison. More recently, QAnon adherents have committed kidnappings, murder, and terrorism.

One QAnon supporter, Marjorie Taylor Greene, is now the Republican nominee in Georgia's 14th Congressional District, and has received campaign donations from the House Freedom Fund and a number of business executives and major GOP funders. Greene has no Democratic challenger, meaning she is guaranteed to become a U.S. representative in 2021.

Greene is a corporate executive, a position that has made her quite wealthy. She owns Taylor Construction, a renovation firm that her father founded. Greene's wealth allowed her to provide nearly \$1.4 million for her campaign via donations and loans.

During Greene's short window of national fame, a trove of racist comments, ads, and social media posts has emerged. She has said that liberal benefactor George Soros, a Holocaust survivor, is a Nazi. She's stated that Muslims should not be allowed to be members of Congress,

saying, “There is an Islamic invasion into our government offices right now.” She calls unemployed people of color lazy and rejects the idea of racial disparities in the U.S. “The most mistreated group of people in the United States today are white males,” Greene concluded in a video.

Greene is perhaps the most vocal QAnon backer of the GOP congressional nominees. She recorded a lengthy video, allegedly in November 2017, explaining the main Q conspiracy and clearly endorsing it. “There’s a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to take this global cabal of Satan-worshipping pedophiles out, and I think we have the president to do it,” she said.

Other candidates who have expressed favorable views of QAnon clinched GOP nominations in liberal districts and are unlikely to ascend to the House or Senate. And another extremist GOP nominee, anti-Muslim bigot Laura Loomer, has also received support from some of the same business leaders who support QAnon-linked candidates. Loomer’s history of discriminatory statements led companies such as Facebook, Twitter, Lyft, and PayPal to permanently ban her from their platforms.

Among other atrocious displays of bigotry, Loomer has celebrated the deaths of 2,000 migrants, denounced rideshare services for having Muslim drivers, and was banned from Twitter for harassing Rep. Ilhan Omar (D-Minn.), whom Greene has also attacked.

Loomer is a conspiracy theorist but is not associated with the QAnon movement. Trump praised Loomer after her primary victory.

GOP Cozies Up to QAnon

Many key individual donors to these extremist candidates are also big-time supporters of the president, who often promotes wild conspiracy theories he’s caught wind of from social media, Fox News, or other rightwing media outlets. Trump has made no secret of his support for Greene, calling her as “a future Republican star” on August 12.

In June, House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy’s spokesperson called some of Greene’s racist statements “appalling.” But McCarthy stayed neutral in Greene’s Republican primary and welcomed her to his caucus after she won an August runoff election, saying she’ll get committee seats.

In the last few years, vocal QAnon supporters have shown up at Trump’s numerous campaign rallies sporting T-shirts and signs promoting the conspiracy movement. In turn, the campaign has courted QAnon fanatics, putting its director of press communications on a QAnon program to encourage listeners to attend a Trump Victory Leadership Initiative training.

“We’re seeing the Trump campaign tack closely to an almost explicitly QAnon narrative,” Ethan Zuckerman, director of the Center for Civic Media at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, told *The Washington Post*.

The Republican Party overall has become more receptive to QAnon, likely recognizing that its adherents have become part of the GOP base, a base that’s increasingly populated by those radicalized by right-wing conspiracies and propaganda, often originating in online message

boards and distributed by Fox News and on Facebook. The social media giant has played an important role in QAnon indoctrination, according to tech investor and author Roger McNamee.

“QAnon is turning into an aggregator for standard right-wing talking points, part of their new ‘camouflage’ strategy to decouple conspiracy theories from Q,” tweeted NBC News extremism reporter Ben Collins, after the group elevated a baseless rumor that Joe Biden would be wearing an earpiece at the Sep. 29 presidential debate.

Vice President Mike Pence was set to attend a Montana fundraiser in September hosted by a couple that trafficked in QAnon memes, but he withdrew without explanation after media reports. An AP report indicates that the fundraiser was rescheduled or canceled. GOP candidates from the state, Rep. Greg Gianforte, Sen. Steve Daines, and Rep. Matt Rosendale, planned to attend. Republican Party and Trump campaign officials were also on the guest list: Trump fundraiser and the girlfriend of Donald Trump, Jr., Kimberly Guilfoyle, GOP chairwoman Ronna McDaniel, Republican National Committee (RNC) finance chairman Todd Ricketts, and RNC co-chairman Tommy Hicks Jr.

The couple hosting the event, Carlyn and Michael Borland, has donated \$223,000 to Trump Victory—the Trump campaign and RNC’s joint fundraising committee — nearly \$6,000 directly to the Trump campaign, and \$147,000 to the RNC.

“I don’t think it’s surprising to see the GOP cozying up to Q, but at same time they also see it as a mechanism to deliver more power,” Julian Feeld, co-host of the podcast QAnon Anonymous, told CMD.

“I think as they see [Greene’s] approach they go, ‘Well, this is a very powerful woman. She’s built a coalition incredibly fast, she has money to back it, and she’s done a lot of boots-on-the-ground work.’”

Regarding GOP leaders initially condemning Greene’s remarks and then welcoming her to the caucus, Feeld said, “I think it’s like they protest and then they check: ‘OK, are people horrified, is this going to work, is QAnon being made a big deal of in the mainstream media, is it going to affect my votes, my base?’ And once they realize it doesn’t, I mean, let’s be honest, they’re Republicans, they’re highly pragmatic people, and so of course they’ve adapted to this like they did to [white supremacist outgoing representative] Steve King.

“They just want power, so it’s very simple. It’s not like a moral calculus for them...I think Greene is the rightwing [Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez] for them. I think she will probably be a presidential candidate at some point.”

House Freedom Caucus All-In on Greene

The House Freedom Fund, a PAC associated with the House Freedom Caucus, has endorsed Greene and directed \$227,000 in earmarked contributions to her campaign. Donors can give to Greene and other candidates through the Freedom Fund website, and the fund pays the processing fees.

The Freedom Fund has also endorsed and directed donations to QAnon-friendly GOP nominees Lauren Boebert and Burgess Owens.

The Freedom Fund itself donated \$5,000 to the Greene campaign, and it reported making \$47,000 worth of independent expenditures backing Greene and over \$57,000 supporting Boebert.

Fifteen out of the 37 Freedom Caucus members are alumni of the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), a right-wing pay-to-play network of state lawmakers and corporate lobbyists that writes corporate-friendly model bills.

Current Freedom Caucus members have also helped out Greene. The campaigns of Jim Jordan, who was previously chair of the group, and current chair Andy Biggs (R-AZ), donated \$2,000 and \$1,000, respectively. Biggs' leadership PAC donated \$3,500 to Right Women PAC, which spent money helping Greene. Another member, Rep. Matt Gaetz (R-FL), tweeted enthusiastic support for her.

Your Voice Counts, the leadership PAC of Mark Meadows, the former chair of the Freedom Caucus who is now Trump's chief of staff, donated \$2,000 to the Greene campaign in April, days before his PAC was terminated. Your Voice Counts also donated \$5,000 to the House Freedom Fund.

Gun groups are also supportive of Greene's House bid. The PAC of Gun Owners for America gave the maximum allowed donation of \$5,000 to Greene's campaign, and the National Association for Gun Rights PAC added \$1,000.

Pro-gun activists' support for Greene should come as no surprise. Greene posted a photo to Facebook of herself holding an assault rifle alongside the faces of three progressive congresswomen of color. The company took down the image because it violated its policy against "violence and incitement."

Corporate PACs and Unions Indirectly Aid Greene and Boebert

The corporate PAC of Koch Industries donated \$5,000 to Greene's campaign but asked for a refund after photos emerged of Greene posing with known neo-Nazi leader Chester Doles and members of right-wing militia group.

No other corporate PACs gave directly to the Greene campaign, but several others donated to PACs that did. The PACs that gave to Greene all revolve around Meadows. Through his campaign committee, leadership PAC, a super PAC, and the PAC of the Freedom Caucus, Meadows boosted Greene's campaign or helped fund ads supporting her.

Additional corporate and union PACs gave money to the House Freedom Fund, according to Federal Election Commission (FEC) records. Pfizer PAC gave \$5,000 in January 2019, and Devon Energy gave \$5,000 in April 2020. The National Air Traffic Controllers Association PAC gave \$1,000 in January 2019 and \$2,500 in February 2020.

Pfizer spokesperson Sharon Castillo condemned QAnon but indicated the company PAC will not ask for a refund of its donation to the House Freedom Fund.

“Pfizer’s PAC has not donated to Ms. Greene’s campaign,” she wrote in an email. “Pfizer rejects and condemns the hateful speech and divisive conspiracy theories promoted by the QAnon movement. Our political contributions are led by two guiding principles—furthering innovation and expanding access to medicines and vaccines for the patients we serve.”

Devon Energy spokesperson Lisa Adams told CMD that her company PAC did not contribute to the Freedom Fund.

“I can confirm that no money from our corporate PAC (DEC PAC) was contributed to the House Freedom Fund,” she wrote in an email. “We believe there has been a mistake, and Devon was incorrectly identified as a contributor. We are in touch and working with the FEC to investigate further and correct the information.”

Corporations and unions have also indirectly supported QAnon-friendly candidates by giving to Meadows’ Your Voice Counts.

In 2019, the PACs of the Air Line Pilots Association (\$1,000), Altria Group (\$5,000), Dominion Energy (\$1,000), FedEx (\$3,000), Mylan (\$1,000), National Air Traffic Controllers Association (\$2,000), National Rural Letter Carriers’ Association (\$5,000), and Reynolds American (\$5,000) donated to Your Voice Counts.

AltriaPAC gave \$5,000 to Your Voice Counts in August 2019. Company spokesperson David Sutton told CMD that Altria has not supported Greene and that it “never direct[s] a leadership PAC to make a contribution to a candidate or otherwise earmark our funds for particular candidates.”

“Our contribution to the Meadows’ leadership PAC was well before the leadership PAC’s contribution to [Greene],” said Sutton. “As the leadership PAC’s FEC reports indicate, our contribution was not earmarked for this candidate.”

National Air Traffic Controllers Association spokesperson Doug Church declined to comment, telling CMD that the trade group does not comment on its PAC donations.

The other PACs listed above did not return CMD’s requests for comment.

Your Voice Counts also gave \$5,000 to Right Women PAC, a super PAC that spent over \$26,000 on independent expenditures supporting Greene or opposing her primary opponent, John Cowan. The biggest donor to Right Women PAC by far is Mark Meadows’ campaign committee, having given over \$61,000. The “social welfare” nonprofit Americans for Limited Government donated \$22,500. The group’s chairman and co-founder, Howard Rich, is a director at the libertarian Cato Institute and the conservative political group Club for Growth. Reynolds American PAC added \$2,000.

Other donors of note to Right Women PAC include financial services executive and Heritage Foundation trustee Mark Kolokotronis, who gave \$20,000, and Diana Davis Spencer (\$1,000),

whose charitable foundation is a major player in the right-wing political donor network. Since 2014, Spencer's foundation has given large amounts to dozens of conservative think tanks, higher education programs, and political operations including the Manhattan Institute (\$3.5 million), Hoover Institution (\$1.75 million), the Daily Caller News Foundation (\$550,000), and Turning Point USA (\$325,000), according to CMD's research. The foundation has also contributed to the anti-Muslim hate group the Center for Security Policy, giving \$440,000 since 2014.

Many of the same PACs that contributed to Meadows' leadership PAC or the House Freedom Fund also gave to Meadows' campaign committee directly during the 2020 election cycle:

- Reynolds American PAC (\$10,000)
- National Air Traffic Controllers Association PAC (\$4,500)
- Pfizer PAC (\$3,500)
- Altria Group PAC (\$3,500)
- Koch PAC (\$2,500)
- FedEx PAC (\$2,500)
- Air Line Pilots Association PAC (\$2,000)
- National Rural Letter Carriers' Association (\$1,000)

Not Just Greene

Boebert is a gun rights activist and restaurant owner who upset five-term GOP incumbent Rep. Scott Tipton in the June primary in Colorado's 3rd Congressional District. While her campaign manager told CNN that the GOP nominee "does not follow QAnon," Boebert told the online talk show Steel Truth, which is hosted by a "prominent" QAnon supporter, "Everything I heard of Q—I hope that this is real because it only means America is getting stronger and better, and people are returning to conservative values, and that's what I am for."

The National Republican Congressional Committee, led by Rep. Tom Emmer (R-MN), embraced Boebert, including her in its "Young Guns" fundraising push.

"Lauren won her primary fair and square and has our support," Emmer told NBC News. "This is a Republican seat and will remain a Republican seat as Nancy Pelosi and senior House Democrats continue peddling their radical conspiracy theories and pushing their radical cancel culture," he said.

Burgess Owens, the GOP candidate for Utah's 4th congressional district, is a retired NFL player and a Fox News contributor, and he has appeared on multiple QAnon-friendly talk shows, including one in May and another on Sep. 23. The campaign previously claimed Owens does not support QAnon, yet the candidate appeared on Flockop, which openly supports QAnon, and said, "This is a team effort. What you guys are doing right now is part of the team." Owens is also an NRCC "Young Gun."

Business Executives Backing Extremist Candidates

A number of wealthy business executives and major GOP donors have donated to one or more of the most extreme congressional candidates of the 2020 election cycle.

Lewis Topper

GOP megadonor Lewis Topper, president of Fast Food Systems, Inc., and his wife, Margaret, of Jupiter, Florida, donated \$11,200 to Loomer's campaign, the maximum allowed amount for the primary and general elections. Lewis Topper, who has been a major Wendy's franchisee and lists himself as operating a Domino's pizza franchise, also contributed \$2,800 to the Greene campaign in June.

The Toppers have made over \$2.6 million in federal contributions so far in the 2020 election cycle, including \$595,000 to the RNC, \$575,000 to Trump Victory, and \$235,000 to the National Republican Congressional Committee. In addition, Lewis Topper donated \$25,000 to the pro-Trump super PAC American First Action and another \$25,000 to Club for Growth Action.

Some of Topper's largest contributions went to the American Liberty Fund, a super PAC mostly financed by Topper. The fund has reported spending nearly \$100,000 on independent expenditures, much of it on digital advertising, benefiting four GOP House candidates, including close to \$27,000 backing Loomer.

Robert Shillman

The only other donor to the American Liberty Fund is Robert Shillman, the wealthy founder of machine vision systems company Cognex, who gave \$10,000. He and his wife, Judy, also maxed out to Loomer, each giving \$5,600.

The Shillmans have given nearly \$400,000 to the RNC and \$306,000 to Trump Victory. The couple has also given the maximum allowed campaign contributions to Reps. Devin Nunes (R-CA) and Dan Crenshaw (R-TX), Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY), and vulnerable GOP incumbent Sens. including Thom Tillis (NC), Joni Ernst (IA), Cory Gardner (CO), and Martha McSally (AZ), out of a total of \$882,000 in federal contributions this cycle.

Shillman has a history of funding right-wing extremist organizations and was previously a board member of anti-Muslim hate group the David Horowitz Freedom Center, to which he has also donated. He helped finance a movement against Syrian refugees and has funded ACT for America, another anti-Muslim hate group, and right-wing sting operation Project Veritas. Loomer and British anti-Muslim figure Tommy Robinson were "Shillman Fellows" at the far-right Rebel Media, which had previously employed neo-Nazi sympathizer Faith Goldy.

Shillman also joined an amicus brief filed by the American Freedom Law Center, another hate group, on behalf of "national security experts" supporting Trump's 2018 proposal for "extreme vetting" of incoming refugees.

Shillman's charitable foundation has given hundreds of thousands of dollars each year to Friends of the Israel Defense Forces, but it appears that he does the bulk of his giving through the

Fidelity Charitable Gift Fund, a donor-advised fund sponsor that allows donors to anonymize their contributions. In 2016, the Shillman Foundation gave \$5 million to Fidelity Charitable, meaning that Shillman could then instruct the fund to disperse his donations to other charities without public record of his contributions.

Shillman also runs the International Freedom Alliance Foundation, a nonprofit that sponsored trips to the U.S. by Dutch nativist politician Geert Wilders. The foundation paid a Dutch law firm \$214,000 “on an individual’s behalf...for legal defense fees in defense of free speech” in 2017. In late 2016, judges found Wilders guilty of inciting discrimination of the Netherlands’ Moroccan immigrant community.

In an anti-Muslim speech during an event honoring Shillman at the David Horowitz Freedom Center in August 2017, Wilders said that Shillman “knows that it is our duty to defend our superior Western civilization” from Islam.

Cherna Moskowitz

Republican megadonor Cherna Moskowitz gave \$2,800 to Greene and \$5,600 to Loomer. She’s made \$6.4 million in federal contributions in the 2020 cycle, including \$1.3 million to America First Action, \$700,000 to the NRCC’s joint fundraising committee Take Back the House 2020, \$678,000 to Trump Victory, and \$672,000 to the RNC.

Moskowitz is a major funder of pro-Israel causes, as well as hate groups. In 2018, her charity donated \$75,000 to the Clarion Project and \$50,000 to Proclaiming Justice to the Nations, both considered anti-Muslim hate groups by the Southern Poverty Law Center.

The foundation named after her late husband, Irving, of which she was president in 2018, has also donated to the same hate groups. From 2016 to 2018, the Irving I. Moskowitz Foundation contributed \$275,000 to Proclaiming Justice to the Nations and \$75,000 to the Clarion Project. The foundation also gave \$25,000 to the far-right student political group Turning Point USA in 2018.

Irving Moskowitz donated millions of dollars to Jewish settlement efforts in the Palestinian areas East Jerusalem and the West Bank.

Lawrence Gelman

Another donor of note is Texas anesthesiologist, hospital administrator, and GOP activist Lawrence Gelman, who gave \$1,500 to Greene, \$1,500 to Loomer, and \$1,000 each to Boebert and Owens.

Gelman has been a host of a right-wing radio program and produced a documentary called “The Hoax of Man-Made Global Warming in 2017.” Along with his fringe views, Gelman has financially supported additional extremist candidates, including Kris Kobach (R-KS) in his 2020 Senate bid and former Alabama Chief Justice Roy Moore in his 2017 special Senate race.

The doctor’s older daughter, Zina Bash, a multi-millionaire, has clerked for now-Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh and served as an advisor in Trump’s White House.

Thomas W. Smith

Prescott Investors managing partner Thomas Smith of Boca Raton, Florida has given \$5,000 each to Boebert and Owens. Smith has emerged as a major donor in the right-wing political network of billionaire industrialist Charles Koch. From 2015 to 2018, he donated nearly \$1.4 million through his foundation to conservative media groups, including to the Real Clear Foundation and the National Review Institute, as CMD reported. The Thomas W. Smith Foundation also bankrolls Turning Point USA, the climate change-denying CO2 Coalition, multiple think tanks in the State Policy Network, and numerous free-market higher education programs.

Steven Cowles

Steven Cowles, owner of Cowles Parkway Ford in Virginia, gave \$8,400 to Greene's campaign, which includes maximum allowed amounts for her primary, runoff, and general elections. Cowles has made \$543,000 worth of federal contributions this cycle, including \$231,000 to House Freedom Action, the super PAC affiliated with the House Freedom Caucus, and \$142,000 to Senate Conservatives Action.

In addition to his donations to Greene, Cowles has delivered campaign contributions to right-wing incumbents and candidates including Jim Jordan (R-OH), Dan Bishop (R-NC), Kobach, Paul Gosar (R-AZ), and Louie Gohmert (R-TX).

Tatnall Hillman

GOP megadonor Tatnall Hillman of Colorado gave \$2,800 to Greene and \$4,600 to Boebert. Hillman is the son of coal billionaire J. Hartwell Hillman, Jr., and is a regular Republican megadonor. Along with his wife, Roberta, Hillman contributed over \$1 million to GOP outside spending groups in the 2018 election cycle.

Hillman heavily funded a super PAC, Drain the DC Swamp PAC, which spent \$30,000 on digital and TV ads backing Greene and over \$16,000 on ads against her primary opponent. He was responsible for \$228,000 out of the PAC's total \$316,000 total raised as of August 13. Drain the DC Swamp PAC has also spent money on ads supporting Trump and attacking Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden, as well as ads opposing Democratic primary candidate Pete Buttigieg.

The super PAC's unhinged ads include one called "Creepy Joe Biden," another that includes transphobia, one that broadcasts easily refutable tales of immigrants coming into the U.S. and spreading COVID-19, and one claiming that Buttigieg, a centrist, is a "far-left socialist ideologue."

Additional corporate executives and other figures of note who have donated to one or more extremist candidates in the 2020 election cycle include:

- Matt Miller, president of Indiana-based motorhome company Newmar, donated \$5,600 each to the Greene and Loomer campaigns.

- Nashville's Charles Irby, the son of the founder of Irby Construction, a power-line construction company from Mississippi, and currently head of Irby Investments, donated \$3,300 to Greene and \$2,000 to Loomer.
- Kansan Kenneth Burgess, CEO of Midwest Scrap Management, donated \$2,800 each to Owens and Loomer.
- Bill Pope, CEO of the Texas-based NCIC Inmate Telephone Services, donated \$5,600 to Greene.
- Keith White, vice president at Louisiana-based oil-drilling equipment company Quail Tools, donated \$5,600 to Greene.
- Billionaire Todd Ricketts, a prolific GOP donor, Trump's first deputy commerce secretary nominee, and the current RNC finance chairman, gave \$5,600 to Owens.
- Texan Andy Pitts, CEO of credit card processors MLS Direct Network and Titanium Payments, gave Loomer \$5,600.
- Karen Giorno, a correspondent for right-wing news outlet Newsmax and Loomer's campaign manager, gave \$5,600 to the campaign. Newsmax itself has made political donations. In the current election cycle, the company gave \$50,000 to the pro-Susan Collins (R-ME) super PAC 1820 PAC.