

AMERICANS FOR
TaxFairness

BILLIONAIRES BUYING ELECTIONS

How the Nation's Wealthiest Translate
Economic Power Into Political Clout

JULY 2022



CREDITS

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JULY 2022

[Americans for Tax Fairness](#) is a diverse coalition of hundreds of national and state endorsing organizations that collectively represent tens of millions of members. The organization was formed in 2012 on the belief that the country needs comprehensive, progressive tax reform that results in greater revenue to meet our growing needs. ATF is playing a central role in Washington and in the states on federal tax-reform issues.

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SUMMARY

The nation's roughly 750 billionaires are increasingly using their personal fortunes and the profits of connected corporations to drown out regular voters' voices and elect hand-picked candidates who further rig the nation's economy—especially the tax system—to make their wealthy benefactors even richer. This anti-democratic vote-buying, totaling \$1.2 billion in the 2020 election cycle, has expanded greatly in recent years. It has been facilitated by—and is facilitating—the accelerating wealth growth of the billionaire class and the record profits of the corporations they own.

This election cycle Wall Street billionaires are heavily funding GOP super PACs connected to the House and Senate leadership.

- Almost half the money (47%)—\$89.4 million out of a total of \$188.3 million—raised by the two main GOP congressional super PACs through the first 16 months of the 2022 campaign cycle has come from just 27 billionaires.
- The vast majority, 86%, of that GOP billionaire money came from those who got rich on Wall Street. These billionaires from the finance and investment sectors of the economy particularly benefit from some of the most egregious special breaks in the tax code.
- The Democratic counterparts of the two GOP congressional super PACs have received much less billionaire money: about 17%, or about \$26 million out of \$154 million. These billionaire contributions were much less concentrated by industry: while the most still came from finance and investment (35%), cryptocurrency (26%) and high-tech (18%) were also substantial sources. Crypto billionaires appear to be placing a big bet on Democrats in the hope they will not aggressively pursue regulation of their business.
- These figures fail to capture the full political influence of billionaires, who in addition

to personal donations also steer money to favored candidates from related corporations and organizations.

- Billionaires can well afford their campaign donations: the total net worth of the mega-donors who contributed to the GOP congressional super PACs has increased by \$82 billion (57%) during the first two years of the pandemic, to nearly \$227 billion. Donors to Democratic congressional super PACs have increased their wealth by \$88 billion (70%) during the first two years of the pandemic, to \$213 billion.



The nation's roughly 750 billionaires are increasingly using their personal fortunes and the profits of connected corporations to drown out regular voters' voices and elect hand-picked candidates who further rig the nation's economy.

Some billionaires and their corporations are big backers of candidates who are trying to sabotage our elections, limit our freedom to vote and oppose higher taxes on the rich and corporations.

- Billionaires donated almost \$240 million to the combined campaign efforts of **Donald Trump's** two runs for president. Over half came from just one billionaire household, that of casino magnate Sheldon Adelson (who has since died).
- Since January 6, 2021, corporations and industry-group PACs have given more than \$34 million to 144 members of Congress who voted to overturn the legitimate election of Joe Biden as President. Donors included many firms that in the immediate aftermath of the Capitol riot had pledged not to give any money to the “insurrection caucus.”
- The PACs of seven major Fortune 500 corporations have contributed a combined \$1.5 million to GOP members of Congress (and their two political campaign committees) who voted to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election. They are **UPS, General Motors, FedEx, AT&T, ExxonMobil, Merck and Chevron**. These corporations made \$78 billion in profits last year and paid a combined average federal income tax rate of just 2.7%.
- Paypal co-founder **Peter Thiel**, who is worth about \$5 billion, has so far spent almost \$30 million through super PACs supporting the 2022 senatorial bids of two former employees who share his anti-democratic and anti-tax beliefs. **J.D. Vance** won the Ohio Republican U.S. Senate primary thanks in part to Thiel's \$15 million in spending. **Blake Masters** has a fighting chance in Arizona's GOP U.S. Senate primary in August due to Thiel's \$13.5 million in contributions.

- Wall Street trader **Jeffrey Yass**, who is worth about \$12 billion, has already contributed \$28.5 million to right-wing political candidates, many of them election deniers, and anti-tax and other groups this cycle. Between 2009 and 2018 Yass had income of \$11.4 billion and paid \$1.95 billion in federal income taxes, an effective tax rate of 17.2%— a little more than the 13.3% average rate paid by all families.

Billionaire influence in elections has grown exponentially since the Supreme Court's 2009 *Citizens United* decision.

- Billionaires pumped \$1.2 billion into the 2020 elections, almost 40 times more than the \$31 million they donated in 2010, when the *Citizens United* rules were first in effect. In the 2020 election cycle, billionaires contributed nearly \$1 out of every \$10, while making up just 0.01% of all donors contributing more than \$200.
- Heavy billionaire spending in the 2022 midterm elections is the continuation of an upward trend that began after the controversial *Citizens United* Supreme Court decision a dozen years ago opened the floodgates to unlimited big-money, special-interest campaign contributions.



Almost half the money raised through the first quarter of the 2022 campaign cycle by the two main Congressional GOP super PACs has come from just 27 billionaires.

BILLIONAIRES FLOOD GOP SUPER PACS FOR THE 2022 MIDTERM ELECTIONS

Almost half the money raised as of April in the 2022 campaign cycle—or \$89.4 million out of a total of \$188.3 million—by the two main Republican congressional super PACs (political action committees) has come from just 27 billionaires, according to an Americans for Tax Fairness (ATF) analysis of Federal Election Committee records. [See [spreadsheet tabs 1 and 2](#)]

Unlike candidates and party committees, super PACs can raise [unlimited donations from individuals and corporations](#). In return they are not supposed to coordinate activities with the campaigns they support but instead act independently, though [that rule is often flouted](#).

- The [Congressional Leadership Fund](#) (CLF)—formed to elect Republicans to the House of Representatives—has raked in 49% of its donations, or \$54.9 million out of \$112 million, from just 21 billionaires. [See Table 1 and [spreadsheet tab 4](#)]
- The [Senate Leadership Fund](#) (SLF), established in 2015 by allies of Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell to make the GOP that chamber’s majority party, has collected \$34.5 million out of \$76 million—or 45.4% of its total contributions—from 18 billionaires. [See Table 1 and [spreadsheet tab 5](#)]

By comparison, the Democratic Party’s House and Senate super PACs have raised \$25.7 million—or 16.7%—out of a total of \$154 million from 19 billionaires. [See Table 2 and [spreadsheet tabs 1 and 3](#)]

- The House Majority PAC (HMP) has taken in 25% of its donations, or \$17.5 million out of \$69 million, from 14 billionaires. [See Table 2 and [spreadsheet tab 6](#)]

- The Senate Majority PAC (SMP) has collected \$8.3 million out of \$85 million—or about 10%—from 10 billionaires. [See Table 2 and [spreadsheet tab 7](#)]

These figures probably significantly understate billionaire dominance of campaign financing, especially on the Republican side, since they exclude contributions from corporations that billionaires control and from so-called “dark money” groups established by billionaires or that receive significant contributions from them. These groups—known as 501(c)4s—are not required to disclose [the identity of their donors](#). For example:

- Politically active billionaire Charles Koch has not personally donated to either GOP super PAC this cycle, but his corporation—Koch Industries—has so far given them a total of \$1.75 million. [[Spreadsheet tab 8](#)]
- Two of the [biggest “dark money” groups](#), which do not disclose their donors, are essentially sister groups to the two congressional GOP super PACS. [American Action Network](#) gave at least [\\$26 million](#) to CLF in the 2020 cycle and \$18.7 million so far this cycle. [One Nation](#) donated \$77.5 million to SLF last cycle and has given \$16.5 million so far this cycle. [[Spreadsheet tab 8](#)]

The total net worth of this group of billionaire Republican donors has [increased by \\$82.4 billion to \\$227 billion \(57%\)](#) during the first two years of the pandemic [[Spreadsheet tab 2](#)]. Their nearly \$90 million of Congressional super PAC donations so far this cycle represents less than 0.1% of that wealth growth income—a small investment that could save them billions of dollars by electing Republicans who will oppose tax hikes on the wealthy and corporations.

Table 1: Billionaire Contributions to GOP Congressional Super PACs

Billionaire	Source of Wealth	Senate Leadership Fund	Congressional Leadership Fund	Total	Billionaire Home State
Ken Griffin	Citadel Investment Group	\$10,000,000	\$18,505,000	\$28,505,000	Illinois
Stephen Schwarzman	Blackstone Group	\$10,000,000	\$10,000,000	\$20,000,000	New York
Patrick Ryan	Ryan Specialty Group		\$10,005,000	\$10,005,000	Illinois
Paul Singer	Elliott Management Corporation	\$2,000,000	\$3,005,000	\$5,005,000	New York
Charles (& Hellen) Schwab	Charles Schwab Corporation	\$1,000,000	\$3,010,000	\$4,010,000	California
Bernard (& Billi) Marcus	Home Depot	\$2,000,000	\$1,710,000	\$3,710,000	Georgia
Warren Stephens	Stephens Inc	\$1,000,000	\$2,500,000	\$3,500,000	Arkansas
Rupert Murdoch	News Corp	\$2,000,000		\$2,000,000	New York
Jude Reyes	Reyes Holdings LLC		\$1,500,000	\$1,500,000	Florida
Christopher Reyes	Reyes Holdings LLC		\$1,500,000	\$1,500,000	Florida
Douglas (& Patricia) Leone	Sequoia Capital	\$1,000,000	\$434,800	\$1,434,800	California
Ken Langone	Finance & Investments	\$1,000,000	\$10,000	\$1,010,000	New York
Julian Robertson Jr	Tiger Management LLC	\$1,000,000		\$1,000,000	New York
Marc Rowan	Apollo Global Management	\$1,000,000		\$1,000,000	New York
Trevor (& Jan) Rees-Jones	Chief Oil & Gas	\$250,000	\$750,000	\$1,000,000	Texas
Thomas Tull	Tulco LLC	\$500,000	\$350,000	\$850,000	Pennsylvania
Philip Anschutz	Anschutz Corporation	\$500,000	\$125,000	\$625,000	Colorado
Charles B. Johnson	Franklin Resources		\$510,000	\$510,000	Florida
Jim Davis	New Balance	\$500,000		\$500,000	Massachusetts
Daniel Loeb	Third Point	\$250,000	\$250,000	\$500,000	New York
Robert (& Terry) Rowling	TRT Holdings		\$260,000	\$260,000	Texas
Stanley Druckenmiller	Duquesne Family Office	\$250,000		\$250,000	New York
Bruce Kovner	Caxton Alternative Management	\$250,000		\$250,000	New York
Steve Wynn	Wynn Resorts		\$205,000	\$205,000	Florida
H. Ross Perot Jr	Hillwood Development Company		\$110,000	\$110,000	Texas
Ronald Lauder	RSL Management		\$100,000	\$100,000	New York
Sam Zell	Equity Group Investments		\$50,000	\$50,000	Illinois
TOTAL		\$34,500,000	\$54,889,800	\$89,389,800	

Sources: ATF [spreadsheet tab 2](#) based on Federal Election Commission (FEC) data

Table 2: Billionaire Contributions to Democratic Congressional Super PACs

Billionaire	Source of Wealth	Senate Majority PAC	House Majority PAC	Total	Billionaire Home State
Sam Bankman-Fried	FTX exchange	\$500,000	\$6,000,000	\$6,500,000	California
Jim Simons	Renaissance Technologies	\$3,000,000	\$2,500,000	\$5,500,000	New York
Reid Hoffman	LinkedIn	\$550,000	\$1,950,000	\$2,500,000	California
George Marcus	Marcus & Millichap		\$2,000,000	\$2,000,000	California
Jon Stryker	Stryker Corp.	\$800,000	\$1,000,000	\$1,800,000	New York
David Shaw	D.E. Shaw	\$1,000,000	\$400,000	\$1,400,000	New York
Steve Ballmer	Microsoft		\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000	Washington
Jeff Skoll	eBay	\$1,000,000		\$1,000,000	California
Stephen Mandel Jr	Lone Pine Capital		\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000	Connecticut
Henry & Marsha Laufer	Renaissance Technologies	\$1,000,000		\$1,000,000	Florida
John Fisher	The Gap		\$744,500	\$744,500	California
Edythe & Eli Broad	Sun Life Insurance		\$250,000	\$250,000	California
Chris Larsen	Ripple		\$250,000	\$250,000	California
Haim Saban	Media/Entertainment		\$250,000	\$250,000	California
Amy Goldman Fowler	Solil Management	\$250,000		\$250,000	New York
Robert Bass	Oil/Energy		\$100,000	\$100,000	Texas
Jared Isaacman	Shift4 Payments	\$100,000		\$100,000	Pennsylvania
James Chambers	Cox Enterprises	\$60,000		\$60,000	New York
Elaine Wynn	Wynn Resorts		\$30,000	\$30,000	Nevada
TOTAL		\$8,260,000	\$17,474,500	\$25,734,500	

Sources: ATF [spreadsheet tab 3](#) based on FEC data



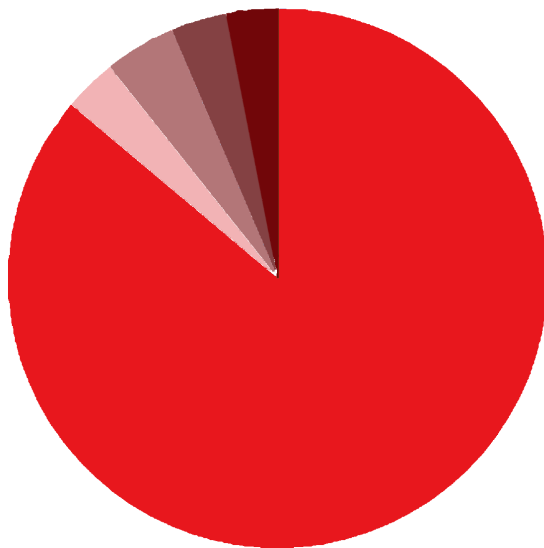
Unlike candidates and party committees, super PACs can raise unlimited donations from individuals and corporations.

GOP CONGRESSIONAL BILLIONAIRE SUPER PAC DONORS NEARLY ALL COME FROM WALL STREET

So far in the 2022 election cycle, 86% of billionaire money donated to the two GOP congressional super PACs has come from plutocrats who got rich in the finance and investment sectors of the economy. [See left figure] These billionaires benefit most from some of the biggest special breaks in the tax code, including the “carried interest” loophole and the discounted tax rate on long-term capital gains. Republicans have consistently opposed proposals to end these tax giveaways to the wealthy, including those made by President Biden in recent years.

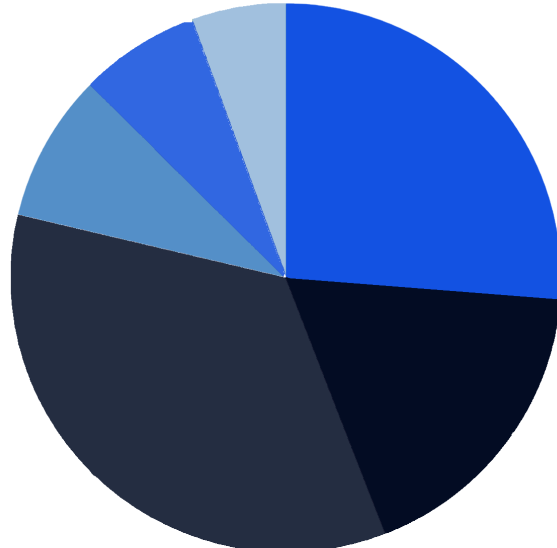
Billionaires giving to Democratic congressional super PACs this cycle are from a more diverse set of industries. About one-third are from finance and investments, a quarter are newly minted cryptocurrency billionaires, and 18% hail from the high-tech sector—a surprisingly low share given the explosive growth of billionaire wealth in this sector in recent years. [See right figure] Equally surprising, GOP congressional super PACs don’t appear to have gotten any money from high-tech billionaires.

BILLIONAIRE CONTRIBUTIONS TO GOP SUPER PACS BY SECTOR (2022 CYCLE)



- Finance & Investments, 86.1%
- Other, 3.1%
- Food & Beverage, 3.4%
- Fashion & Retail, 4.3%
- Media & Entertainment, 3.2%

BILLIONAIRE CONTRIBUTIONS TO DEM SUPER PACS BY SECTOR (2022 CYCLE)



- Finance & Investments, 34.6%
- Cryptocurrency, 26.2%
- Technology, 17.9%
- Real Estate, 8.7%
- Healthcare, 7%
- Other, 5.6%

Sources: ATF analysis of FEC and Forbes data, spreadsheet [tab 2](#) & [tab 3](#)

BIGGEST BILLIONAIRE DONORS TO CONGRESSIONAL SUPER PACS IN 2022



KEN GRIFFIN

Griffin is the biggest donor to the two GOP super PACs, having contributed \$28.5 million so far this cycle. [Table 1] This hedge-fund pioneer was the nation's [25th wealthiest billionaire](#) in April, 2022, and the richest in Illinois. His net worth more than doubled during the first two years of the pandemic, shooting up \$15.6 billion, or nearly 130%, to \$27.7 billion.

Griffin's level of political giving this cycle is not unusual. He has been a long-time Republican mega-donor, contributing more than [\\$146 million](#) to federal candidates and PACs over the past decade. Most of those contributions have gone to the two GOP congressional super PACs: [SLF \(\\$49 million\)](#) and [CLF \(\\$34 million\)](#). Griffin has also heavily invested in the political careers of Florida's Republican U.S. senators, contributing \$10 million to a Rick Scott super PAC and \$5 million to Marco Rubio's super PAC.

Griffin doesn't restrict his political investments to Congressional races. In 2020, [he contributed \\$54 million](#) to the successful effort to defeat an Illinois constitutional amendment that would have allowed his home state to set higher tax rates on the super-wealthy like him.

Griffin's Citadel investment firm last year was caught up in the [stock-market controversy](#) surrounding the Robinhood trading app. Under what's known as "payment for order flow," Citadel reimbursed Robinhood for the right to execute trades for Robinhood's customers. Citadel was accused of failing to get Robinhood traders the best price and, as one of the biggest sources of revenue for the app, pressuring it to suspend trading in certain hot stocks like GameStop to the benefit of other Citadel-connected traders.



STEPHEN SCHWARZMAN

Having given \$20 million, Schwarzman is the second biggest billionaire contributor this cycle to the two GOP congressional super PACs [Table 1]. Chief of the huge investment firm Blackstone, he was America's [19th wealthiest billionaire](#) in April, with a net worth that's more than doubled over the first two years of the pandemic, up \$21.1 billion (137%) to \$36.5 billion.

Despite his extraordinary wealth, Schwarzman does not pay an extraordinary federal income tax rate. On almost \$5 billion in reported income between 2013-18, he [paid a tax rate of just](#)

[22.3%](#). By comparison, the top marginal tax rate on ordinary income from a salary and most other sources is 37%. And Schwarzman likely wasn't taxed on most or any of the \$6.7 billion growth in his fortune over those years (unless he sold some of his winning investments).

One reason his effective tax rate was so far below the top marginal rate on ordinary income is probably that he received a lot of his income in tax-favored form. In 2021, he took home [over \\$1 billion in compensation](#) split between so-called "carried interest" and stock dividends, both of which face a top tax rate of just 20%.

Schwarzman doesn't rely solely on campaign contributions to ensure his economic interests. In 2019, a Blackstone-owned medical group teamed up with another health-care company on a \$28 million ad [campaign attacking legislative efforts to end surprise medical billing](#). The Blackstone medical firm is one of those that socks patients with big out-of-pocket expenses.



PATRICK RYAN

Coming in third on the list of billionaire donors to the two GOP congressional super PACs, Ryan contributed all of his roughly \$10 million to the House side [Table 1]. Ryan is an insurance magnate whose [fortune nearly tripled](#) during the first 24 months of the pandemic, leaping \$5.2 billion to \$8.1 billion.

He was [another big contributor](#) (along with Ken Griffin, see above) to the successful effort to block fairer taxes on the wealthy residents of Illinois, kicking in \$1 million to defeat a constitutional amendment in 2020.



PAUL SINGER

The fourth biggest billionaire GOP congressional super PAC donor, hedge-fund manager Singer has given both of them a total of \$5 million this cycle [Table 1]. As of April 2022, Singer's [net worth had risen by \\$800 million](#), to \$4.3 billion, over the first two years of the pandemic.

Singer's fund, Elliott Management, has been [held up as an example](#) of the damage so-called "activist" investors can do to the companies they target. A report last year by the Communications Workers of America and a union-affiliated investment group found that Elliott-targeted corporations take on excessive debt, cut workers and wages, reduce investment and buy back a lot of stock, which enriches investors.

Though 2017's Trump-GOP tax law showered the wealthy and corporations with favors, Singer tried to [extract even more](#) by using shell companies to get around mild restrictions on the use of "carried interest" compensation to cut the tax bill of money managers like him.



SAM BANKMAN-FRIED

A [newcomer](#) to the world of political influence, Sam Bankman-Fried made his [\\$24 billion](#) fortune through FTX, a cryptocurrency exchange platform. In just the past three years he has made [\\$38.5 million](#) in political contributions to advance mostly left-of-center candidates, as well as donating [\\$5 million to ProPublica](#).

Bankman-Fried has already [spent nearly \\$33 million](#) this cycle. He's created his own super PAC "[Protect Our Future](#)," to which he has contributed [\\$23 million](#). He is the top giver this cycle, at \$6.5 million, to the two Democratic congressional super PACs, with all but \$500,000 going to the House Majority PAC.

In early 2022, Protect Our Future spent [\\$11.4 million](#) to support political novice Carrick Flynn in an Oregon Democratic primary. Despite having a 2-to-1 spending advantage over the rest of the eight-person primary field combined, Flynn ended up garnering [18.6% of the vote](#), good for second place. Bankman-Fried ended up spending \$912 per vote for Flynn, almost certainly the highest amount paid per vote by a super PAC this election cycle.

Despite that embarrassing loss, Bankman-Fried's super PAC has managed to put [money behind](#) the winning candidate in [eight other Democratic primary elections](#) this cycle, potentially seeding the next Congress with a crop of new members sympathetic to cryptocurrency deregulation.

NOTABLE BILLIONAIRE DONORS NOT DIRECTLY FUNDING CONGRESSIONAL SUPER PACS IN 2022



PETER THIEL

A co-founder of PayPal and early investor in Facebook, Thiel is [worth around \\$5 billion](#) after his fortune more than doubled (up 130%) during the pandemic. He has made at least [\\$29 million](#) in political contributions between 2013 and 2021, mostly to conservative candidates and organizations.

His attempts to buy elections has accelerated dramatically this cycle. He [gave \\$15 million](#) to a super PAC supporting Ohio Republican U.S.

Senate candidate J.D. Vance, who calls Joe [Biden a “fake president.”](#) Thiel’s money is [credited with helping Vance](#) win the very competitive primary.

Thiel also gave [\\$13.5 million](#) to a super PAC backing Arizona Republican U.S. Senate candidate Blake Masters, who has [declared Donald Trump](#) won the 2020 election. (Vance and Masters both used to work for Thiel.) Trump has endorsed both candidates, and he and Thiel appear to be coordinating efforts to get them elected.

Billionaires trying to buy elections is especially dangerous when they support anti-democratic candidates, causes and beliefs. Thiel has declared [freedom incompatible with democracy](#) and backed up that belief with donations to candidates and campaigns that have recently undermined democratic government.

He contributed the legal maximum to at least three prominent Republican members of Congress who in the wake of the deadly Capitol riot voted [against certifying the results](#) of the 2020 presidential election: Sen. [Ted Cruz](#) of Texas; House Republican leader [Kevin McCarthy](#) (both his personal campaign and his Leadership PAC) and Rep. Ted Budd of North Carolina, now that state’s Republican [candidate for U.S. Senate](#).

Thiel’s political largesse is not limited to supporting 2020 election deniers. Between 2012-18, he donated \$3 million to [Club For Growth Action](#), a right-wing super PAC, which along with its sister organization, Club for Growth, concentrate their efforts on [cutting taxes on the wealthy and corporations](#).



JEFFREY YASS

A Wall Street [trader worth about \\$12 billion](#), Yass has over the years donated almost [\\$32 million to Club for Growth Action](#), the conservative group that pushes for tax cuts for rich people like himself and fewer regulations for the corporations he invests in. In the 2022 cycle Yass has already contributed [\\$28.5 million](#) to right-wing political candidates, many of them election deniers, and groups.

In the 2020 cycle, Yass donated about [\\$30 million](#) bankrolling conservative Republican super PACs like Club for Growth Action and the Protect America PAC, both of which backed lawmakers who tried to overturn the 2020 election results. Yass’s tentacles have an even tighter grip on Pennsylvania, where he’s single handedly funding the fight to privatize and divert money from public schools.

According to tax data uncovered by [ProPublica](#), between 2009 and 2018 Yass had a reported income of \$11.4 billion and paid \$1.95 billion in federal income taxes, an effective tax rate of 17.2%. That’s a little more than the [13.3% tax rate paid by average American families](#) in 2019. Another [ProPublica report](#) revealed that Yass paid one of the lowest tax rates among Wall Street billionaires, by evading the rules regarding high-speed trading.

2022 BILLIONAIRE POLITICAL SPENDING CONTINUES RECENT UPWARD TREND

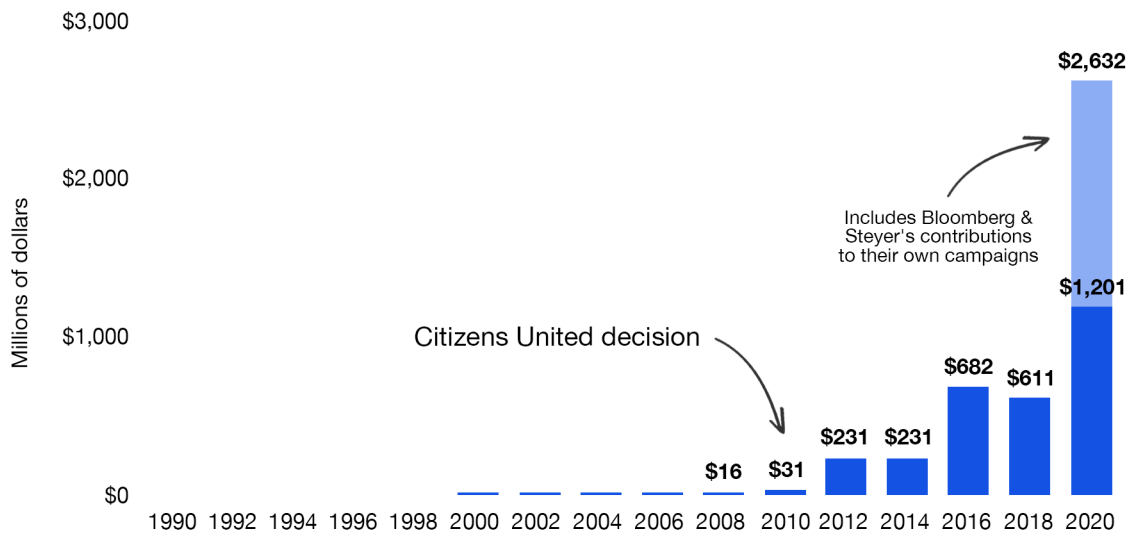
Following the Supreme Court’s [2009 Citizens United decision](#)—which allowed for unlimited political contributions by rich donors and corporations—billionaires dramatically increased their campaign financing activity. [Their political donations grew](#) from a relatively modest \$31 million in the 2010 elections (the first held under the new rules) to \$1.2 billion in the 2020 presidential cycle—a nearly 40-fold increase. [See figure]

Billionaire political donations in 2020 were nearly double the \$682 million in 2016, the last presidential election. [See [full data set](#)]

Contribution data is from the Open Secrets database at the Center for Responsive Politics and covers donations made to candidates, party committees, PACs, super PACs and 527 groups.

In the 2020 election cycle, billionaires contributed nearly \$1 out of every \$10, while making up just 0.01% of all donors contributing more than \$200. In the 2010 election cycle—the dawn of the *Citizens United* era—billionaires provided less than 1% of all contributions. There were 401 billionaires in 2010 and 661 in 2020, according to Forbes data. [See figure on next page]

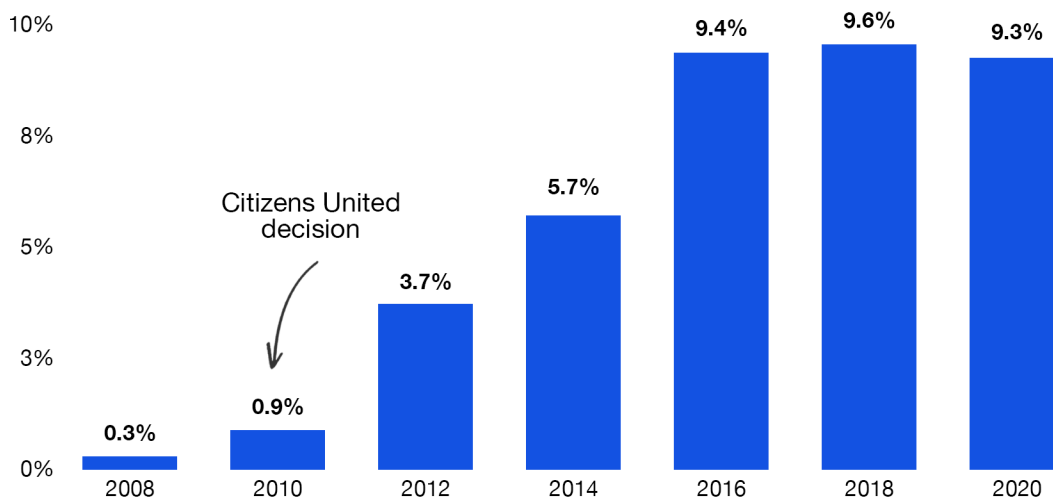
Total billionaire contributions by election cycle



Source: [Americans for Tax Fairness](#), Jan. 2022, based on data from OpenSecrets.org and Forbes

“ Following the Supreme Court’s 2009 Citizens United decision, billionaires dramatically increased their campaign financing activity.”

Billionaire contributions as % of total federal contributions



Source: [Americans for Tax Fairness](#), Jan. 2022, based on data from OpenSecrets.org and Forbes

TRUMP WAS A BIG BENEFICIARY OF HIS FELLOW BILLIONAIRES

Former President Donald Trump was the beneficiary of [almost a quarter billion dollars](#) in support for his two presidential runs from 134 of America's billionaires—more than half of it from casino magnate Sheldon Adelson. The billionaires' \$236 million largesse was a good investment, as Trump's biggest legislative achievement—the 2017 tax overhaul—was one factor helping the fortunes of U.S. billionaires [grow by a collective \\$2 trillion](#), or 70%, during the first two years of the pandemic. The 2017 law [mostly benefited the rich and corporations](#).

Nearly 90% of Trump's \$236 million haul came from just eight billionaire benefactors: Adelson, who along with his wife Miriam gave \$120 million; professional wrestling's Vince and Linda McMahon, \$23 million; Marvel comics chair Isaac Perlmutter and his wife Laura, \$21 million;

Home Depot founder Bernard Marcus and his wife Billi Wilma, \$17 million; oil and gas pipeline owner Kelcy Warren and his wife Amy, \$10 million; TD Ameritrade founder J. Joe Ricketts and his wife Marlene, \$8.2 million; real estate investor and banker Andrew Beal, \$7.2 million; and building supply company founder Diane Hendricks, \$5.5 million. [See [all data here](#)]



POLITICAL DONATIONS BY TAX-DODGING CORPORATIONS ALSO AID BILLIONAIRES AND ELECTION DENIERS

As noted above, some billionaire contributions make their way to election campaigns indirectly, such as through corporations that billionaires own or control. But even in instances where a politically active corporation is not owned or controlled by a single billionaire, the billionaire class can be well served by the firm's campaign contributions. Billionaires and other super-wealthy people are by far the [biggest investors in corporate stock](#) so the political contributions of corporations tend to promote those investors' economic interests.

Like the wealth of billionaires themselves, a lot of corporate money this election cycle is going to deniers of the legitimacy of the 2020 presidential election. Moreover, some of the same big corporations undermining our democracy by funding members of Congress who voted against confirming Joe Biden as president also undermine our national finances by dodging their fair share of taxes.

Every dollar a corporation avoids paying in taxes is one more dollar it can contribute to members of Congress and candidates trying to overturn elections and make it more difficult for people to vote. Every dollar they avoid paying in taxes is one less dollar available to lower costs families pay for healthcare, childcare, housing, education and to confront the challenge of climate change.

Since January 6, 2021, corporations and industry

group PACs have [given more than \\$34.3 million](#) to 144 members of Congress who voted to overturn the legitimate election of Joe Biden as President in 2020, according to Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington. These corporate donors included many firms that in the immediate aftermath of the Capitol riot had pledged not to give any money to the "insurrection caucus."

At least seven of the corporate donors to election deniers are also massive tax avoiders—paying a combined average federal income tax rate for 2021 of just 2.7% on \$78 billion in total profits. [See table on next page]

The seven "election denier/tax avoider" corporations are:

United Parcel Service: UPS has contributed—either directly or through Republican election committees—\$437,500 to congressional candidates who deny the validity of the 2020 presidential election. In 2021, the company paid a federal income tax rate of less than 10% on \$14 billion in profits. In 2018—the first year under the Trump-GOP tax law—[UPS paid just 1.6%](#) on over \$5.6 billion in earnings.

General Motors: The auto giant has donated over \$234,000 to the congressional campaigns of election deniers and the committees that support them. GM last year paid a minuscule



Some of the same big corporations undermining our democracy by funding members of Congress who voted against confirming Joe Biden as president also undermine our national finances by dodging their fair share of taxes.

Table 3: Corporate Campaign Contributions to Election Deniers & 2021 Federal Tax Rates

Corporation	Recipient Members & Committees	GOP Members of Congress & Leadership PACs	GOP Election Committees (NRCC & NRSC)	Total Contributions 2022 Cycle	2021 Profit (\$) Billions	2021 Federal Income Tax Rate
UPS	74	\$327,500	\$110,000	\$437,500	\$14.0	9.9%
General Motors	57	\$209,000	\$25,000	\$234,000	\$9.4	0.2%
AT&T	40	\$157,000	\$60,000	\$217,000	\$29.6	-4.1%
FedEx	52	\$152,500	\$60,000	\$212,500	\$4.7	4.2%
ExxonMobil	53	\$131,500	\$15,000	\$146,500	\$9.3	2.8%
Merck	24	\$75,000	\$45,000	\$120,000	\$1.9	4.0%
Chevron	43	\$113,000	\$0	\$113,000	\$9.5	1.8%
TOTAL/AVG		\$1,165,500	\$315,000	\$1,480,500	\$78.4	2.7%

Sources: Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, [“This sedition is brought to you by...”](#), accessed July 6, 2022 and Center for American Progress, [“These 19 Fortune 100 Companies Paid Next to Nothing—or Nothing—in Taxes in 2021,”](#) April 26, 2022

0.2% federal income tax rate on \$9.4 billion in profits.

AT&T: The telecom leader has contributed \$217,000 to the candidacies and party campaign committees of congressional candidates who refuse to accept the outcome of the 2020 presidential election. Last year AT&T made almost \$30 billion in profits, yet paid a negative federal income tax rate, meaning it got a refund.

FedEx: Congressional election deniers and their supportive GOP campaign committees have received \$212,500 from FedEx. The package-delivery behemoth in 2021 paid just a 4.2% federal income tax rate on \$4.7 billion in profits. Over the previous three years FedEx [paid no federal income taxes](#) on a total of \$8.2 billion in profits. FedEx founder and long-time chairman, Fred Smith, is a billionaire who [got \\$2 billion, or nearly 75%, richer](#) during the first two years of the pandemic.

ExxonMobil: The international oil conglomerate has pitched in \$146,500 to GOP congressional candidates who reject the results of the 2020 presidential contest and GOP campaign committees that support them. In 2021, flush from huge increases in gas prices, ExxonMobil paid just 2.8% in federal income taxes on \$9.3 billion in corporate earnings.

Merck: The huge pharmaceutical firm has given \$120,000 to members of Congress who refuse to accept the 2020 presidential election as legitimate, including to their GOP campaign committees. Last year, Merck paid only a 4% federal income-tax rate on almost \$2 billion of profits.

Chevron: The big oil company has donated \$113,000 to the campaigns and campaign committees of members of Congress who voted against confirming Joe Biden as president. Despite \$9.5 billion in 2021 earnings, Chevron paid a federal income tax rate of only 1.8%.

CONCLUSION

Billionaires and other super-wealthy people already dominate our economy, taking in a disproportionate share of the nation's income and owning an even more lopsided portion of its wealth. This topheavy arrangement makes our economic system unstable and blocks the progress of working families trying to get by and get ahead.

Now billionaires and their allies are working even harder to translate their economic power into political clout by flooding elections with cash in support of candidates who will do their bidding. A leading billionaire policy goal is preserving and expanding loopholes that shield them from paying their fair share of taxes. Once enacted, these tax changes make billionaires even richer, freeing up more money for political donations—and the cycle repeats itself.

We can help short circuit this vicious cycle by more fairly taxing billionaires. (We also need major campaign finance reform, including the abolishment of super PACs.) By demanding more taxes from the super-rich, we can curb their political influence while at the same time raising revenue to lower costs paid by working families

for vital services like healthcare, childcare and education, and more effectively confront climate change.

Taxing billionaires more begins with some form of a billionaires income tax. [Legislation has been proposed](#) by President Biden, Sen. Ron Wyden (D-OR) and Rep. Jamaal Bowman. Such a reform would tax the increased value of the assets of the ultra-rich, like corporate stock, similar to the way workers' wages are taxed, whether they sell those assets or not. This way income from wealth will be taxed more like workers' wages. The growth in these assets is the biggest form of income for the ultra-rich, and it can now go entirely untaxed.

President Biden's version of a billionaires income tax could [raise \\$360 billion](#) over 10 years. Sen. Wyden's tax could [raise more than \\$550 billion](#).

The most important step Congress could take is to enact some form of a billionaires income tax. But the most important goal would be to prove, despite their almost limitless resources, billionaires still can't buy one thing: democracy.



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