



(Editorial illustration by Lisa Graves/True North Research. Image of Yass drawn from Center for Education Reform event.)

A Backgrounder on Jeff Yass, the Right-Wing Billionaire Trying to Capture the Pennsylvania Supreme Court

By Lisa Graves, Evan Vorpahl, and Caitlin Mahoney (October 2023)

Who's Trying to Capture the Pennsylvania Supreme Court and More? Jeff Yass

American democracy has a billionaire problem. It's not just that they're not paying their fair share of taxes: they're trying to buy our highest courts to advance their personal agendas, bending the law to their will.

Pennsylvania is the latest target of this new brand of billionaire ambition, which used to be focused on acquiring sports franchises, like **the Eagles**. Who's the billionaire trying to capture the Commonwealth's highest court? It's **Jeff Yass**, Pennsylvania's richest resident, a Queens-born New York native.



(Credit: Eddie Malluk, poker photo archive.)

But Yass is not operating alone in this ambitious effort to acquire a court that suits him.

Other far-right, out-of-state billionaires have targeted state supreme courts too, like **Dick Uihlein**—a brewery heir who owns ULINE and funded groups that fueled the Jan. 6 insurrection. **Leonard Leo**—who runs a billion dollar-plus trust and who helped orchestrate the U.S. Supreme Court's reversal of **Roe v. Wade**—has also funded groups trying to fill Pennsylvania's highest court and other state and federal offices with Federalist Society-tied ideologues to advance his agenda for the law.

Billionaires like Jeff Yass are spending to win high courts and advance their personal interests, bending our laws to their will.

Yass' cash is king in the right-wing court capture operation in Pennsylvania. His money is underwriting attack ads against Judge **Dan McCaffery** (who is backed by abortion rights groups and labor), ads designed to aid Judge **Carolyn Carluccio** (who is backed by pro-life groups seeking to ban abortion plus other groups). They each won their

primaries and are facing each other in the race for the state Supreme Court in the general election coming up on November 7, 2023.

How Rich Is Jeff Yass? He's the 49th richest man in the world, with an estimated \$28.5 billion fortune.¹ Through betting on markets he rakes in about \$1.3 billion a year² or an average of \$625,000 an hour in a 40-hour week. It would take the average Pennsylvanian 26,000 years working full-time to earn what he makes in a year. It would take spending a million a year for 30,000 years to zero out his wealth. That's longer than the age of the Lascaux cave paintings, the first artistic proof of human civilization.

The company he created, **Susquehanna International Group (SIG)** located northwest of Philadelphia, is what's known as a "market maker"³ in the stock market. It trades more than 100 million shares a day,⁴ as part of its ultra-rapid trading strategy. He has also invested deeply in training traders on "quant" or algorithmic trading to help beat the market.⁵

SIG's portfolio of stocks was valued at nearly one-half of a trillion dollars (\$491,756,191,898) this summer.⁶ That total includes significant holdings in Elon Musk's **Tesla**, China-based **ByteDance/TikTok**, **Meta (Facebook)**, **Google**, and **Dow**. As of 2018, Yass reportedly owned about 75% of the privately-held SIG.⁷

Being a Multi-Billionaire Is Not Enough. Yass (pronounced "yahs") has avoided at least one billion dollars in taxes since 2016, according to Justin Elliot, an investigative reporter for *ProPublica*.⁸ Professor Gregg Polsky called his tax strategies "very suspicious and suggestive of potential abuse."⁹ Yass declined to comment.¹⁰ (Earlier this year, Elliot helped break the story of how billionaire **Harlan Crow** has funded the luxury lifestyle of Supreme Court Justice **Clarence Thomas**.¹¹)

¹ <https://www.forbes.com/billionaires/>

² <https://www.inquirer.com/business/yass-susquehanna-sig-irs-taxes-propublica-20220414.html>

³ <https://www.sec.gov/comments/sr-cboe-2019-035/srboe2019035-6535880-200548.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2018-11-20/the-poker-aces-playing-a-key-hand-in-the-5-trillion-etf-market>

⁵ <https://sig.com/quantitative-trading/trading/>

⁶ <https://fintel.io/i13fs/susquehanna-international-group-llp>

⁷ <https://www.propublica.org/article/jeff-yass-susquehanna-tiktok-tax-avoidance>

⁸ <https://www.propublica.org/article/jeff-yass-susquehanna-tiktok-tax-avoidance>

⁹ <https://www.propublica.org/article/jeff-yass-susquehanna-tiktok-tax-avoidance>

¹⁰ <https://www.propublica.org/article/jeff-yass-susquehanna-tiktok-tax-avoidance>

¹¹ <https://www.propublica.org/article/clarence-thomas-scotus-undisclosed-luxury-travel-gifts-crow>

Most Americans pay about 25% of their wages in taxes, but *ProPublica* says Yass often paid about 19%.¹² That's a lot of savings on a billion.

So what is a billionaire going to do with all that extra money?

If you're Yass, you'll spend a tiny percentage of it, like \$100 million in the past few years,¹³ betting on politics to change the rules of the game. With Yass' massive fortune, one hundred million is just .0035, or the equivalent of \$482 to a Pennsylvanian of median net worth.¹⁴ That is like one large latte and the breakfast deal at **Dunkin Donuts** every week for a year. But, of course, this is a deal with much bigger stakes.

Billionaires like Yass have been expanding their political investment portfolios beyond legislators to include a new commodity: our courts. And Pennsylvania's Supreme Court is his target.

Yass Is Very Successful, But Some of His Notions Are ... What?!

When a multi-billionaire is spending millions to influence American institutions, like our state or federal courts, it is important to understand their tactics and agenda. Yass, a math major, made his first fortune after figuring out a way to bet on every possible winner in some cumulative jackpots in horse and dog racing.¹⁵ He would walk in with stacks of cash and walk out with hundreds of thousands of dollars more.¹⁶ With his talent for betting on sure things and using the system to get what he wants, he's investing in judicial candidates, essentially making wagers on our courts.

Yass: "Everyone is living almost the same life. Except rich people have jobs they like and poor people have jobs they don't like."

But his public comments demonstrate that in some key ways he is out of touch with what life is like for many everyday Pennsylvanians who aren't super rich like him.

When it comes to the growing wealth gap between billionaires like himself and other Americans, Yass has made some astonishing claims, like asserting: "**The left came up with this idea of income inequality.** It's like, what are you talking about?¹⁷ It's just the opposite." Tell that to the families struggling from paycheck to paycheck across the state of Pennsylvania, where the annual median income is a little more than \$32K, and the average household income for a family is about \$67K.¹⁸

Yass Said What?! Yass told the right-wing **Manhattan Institute** that "[O]nce you make \$70,000 a year, your financial concerns are pretty much, you know, not completely over, but largely over. We're almost at a point in America, not around the rest of the world, but we're getting there, that ... everybody has all the stuff they need. **No one's hungry, no one's cold, no one doesn't have some basic health insurance.**"¹⁹

- Yass has been bankrolling the **Club for Growth** while one of its top priorities has been to elect politicians to repeal the **Affordable Care Act**,²⁰ which provides access to health insurance, and to slash poverty programs in order to cut the budget deficit.²¹

Many Pennsylvanians are already being squeezed pretty hard by corporate greed. A new car, at \$48K, is well above the median income, housing costs are rising, and oil and food corporations are gouging American consumers to lavish CEOs with staggering pay and to pay big dividends to shareholders,²² like **Susquehanna International Group**.

Yass Said What?! "What's the difference between a billionaire and a guy who's making \$100,000 a year? They're both at home watching **Netflix** and they're both on their **iPhones** and they're both listening to the same music. **The disparity between how rich people live and how poor people live in America has never been smaller... Everyone is living almost the same life. Except rich people have jobs they like and poor people have jobs they don't like**, but they have all the stuff that they need to a much greater extent than ever."²³ He did note that the number of people living in poverty *globally* has dropped, which is true.

¹⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wncgxj7-e3w>

¹⁸ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/PA/INC110221>

¹⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wncgxj7-e3w>

²⁰ <https://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/328150-club-for-growth-to-target-moderate-republicans-for-stalled-obamacare-repeal>

²¹ <https://www.al.com/politics/2020/08/doug-jones-calls-out-tuberville-for-medicare-ssi-stance-while-clashing-with-pac-over-economy.html>

²² <https://robertreich.org/post/667491205931745280>

²³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wncgxj7-e3w>

¹² <https://www.propublica.org/article/jeff-yass-susquehanna-tiktok-tax-avoidance>

¹³ <https://www.propublica.org/article/jeff-yass-susquehanna-tiktok-tax-avoidance>

¹⁴ <https://www.firstrepublic.com/insights-education/average-american-net-worth-by-age-education-and-more>

¹⁵ <https://www.phillymag.com/news/2009/08/26/beating-the-odds/>

¹⁶ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/antoinetegara/2021/04/06/how-trader-jeff-yass-parlayed-poker-and-horse-racing-bets-into-a-12-billion-fortune/?sh=5f5291bd3eb5>



(Illustration by Lisa Graves/True North Research.)

Yass Said What?! “And as for climate change, I would say **the air, the water that has never been cleaner now than it has been before.**”²⁴ But that’s a dodge because the reality is that the concentration of carbon dioxide is rising, making our planet dangerously hotter.²⁵

Also, as the **American Lung Association** has noted “Philadelphia area residents continue to breathe some of the most unhealthy air in the country... placing their health and lives at risk”²⁶ from asthma and lung cancer which are tied to particulates in the air.

Yass: The minimum wage is “cockamamie...”

Yass Said What?! A “guy I gave a lot of money to was in favor of **the minimum wage, all kinds of cockamamie stuff.** But he was great on school choice. So you’ve got to make a bet.”²⁷ Yes, Yass said ensuring that workers are paid at least a **minimum wage** for their labors is ridiculous, but most Americans actually support having a minimum wage *and* raising it.²⁸

²⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wncgxj7-e3w>

²⁵ <https://www.nasa.gov/news-release/nasa-announces-summer-2023-hottest-on-record/>

²⁶ <https://www.lung.org/media/press-releases/state-of-the-air-philadelphia>

²⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wncgxj7-e3w>

²⁸ <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2021/04/22/most-americans-support-a-15-federal-minimum-wage/>

What Else Does Yass Want? More Profit and Less Regulation

Susquehanna International Group (SIG) was launched by Yass and five poker buddies in 1987. Their investments made money quickly²⁹ when the stock market staggered on “Black Monday,” October 19, 1987, because they had secured an option that would *rise* in value if stocks *fell*.

SIG is massively larger now. As *ProPublica* noted: “Susquehanna is privately held and trades only its own money, meaning it doesn’t have to publicly disclose much about its business.... Susquehanna itself is not a single company but a complex and shifting web of legal entities whose profits flow to Yass and a small set of partners.”³⁰

Yass also extols the “free market,” even though his partnerships—and the trading firms they have held a substantial stake in—have been **fined more than 160 times** for violating rules designed to protect *fair* markets, according to a review of more than 30 registered trading firms related to SIG.³¹ (Yass himself also paid some small fines as a trader years ago.)

Reviewed

PENNSYLVANIA

- SIG INDEX SPECIALISTS, LLC
- SUSQUEHANNA FIXED INCOME, L.P.
- SUSQUEHANNA SECURITIES, LLC
- SUSQUEHANNA INVESTMENT GROUP
- SUSQUEHANNA ADVISORS GROUP, INC.
- HEIGHTS CAPITAL MANAGEMENT, INC.
- SUSQUEHANNA CLEARING, LLC
- HEIGHTS CAPITAL MANAGEMENT, INC.
- SUSQUEHANNA FUNDAMENTAL INVESTMENTS
- SUSQUEHANNA GOVERNMENT PRODUCTS, LLLP
- GLOBAL EXECUTION BROKERS, LP
- SUSQUEHANNA GOVERNMENT PRODUCTS, LLLP
- SUSQUEHANNA FINANCIAL GROUP, LLLP

NEW YORK

- RIVER CROSS SECURITIES
- SUSQUEHANNA CAPITAL GROUP
- SAL EQUITY TRADING, GP
- GI EXECUTION SERVICES, LLC
- ELECTRONIC SECURITIES PROCESSING
- ELECTRONIC SPECIALIST, LLC
- ELECTRONIC SECURITIES PROCESSING
- SIG BROKERAGE, LP

DELAWARE

- SAL TRADING, LLC
- SIG STRUCTURED PRODUCTS, LLC
- DARBY FINANCIAL PRODUCTS
- SUSQUEHANNA EQUITY INVESTMENTS INC.

CAYMAN ISLANDS

- CVI INVESTMENTS, INC
- CAPITAL VENTURES INTERNATIONAL

IRELAND

- SUSQUEHANNA IRELAND LIMITED
- SUSQUEHANNA INTERNATIONAL GROUP LIMITED
- SUSQUEHANNA INTERNATIONAL SECURITIES LIMITED

AUSTRALIA

- SUSQUEHANNA PACIFIC PTY LTD

(Illustration by Lisa Graves/True North Research.)

²⁹ <https://www.phillymag.com/news/2009/08/26/beating-the-odds/>

³⁰ <https://www.propublica.org/article/jeff-yass-susquehanna-tiktok-tax-avoidance>

³¹ <https://www.finra.org/investors/investing/working-with-investment-professional/about-brokercheck>

FINRA records detail these mandatory “disclosure events” and show that **Yass-tied firms have agreed to pay more than \$10 million in fines** to the Securities and Exchange Commission and other regulators.³² The firms conceded liability sometimes and sometimes not, but paid the fines, some substantial. Sometimes they had to disgorge illegally gained profits.

True North also identified dozens of other connected affiliates (current or former), including **SIG Sports Analytics, SIG ETF Group, Bala Energy Trading, and Sig Global India Fund I LLP**. A list of all SIG affiliated firms is not public. SIG does reveal the stocks it holds, as required.

Yass-tied trading firms have had to pay six-figure fines as recently as this summer, when **Susquehanna Securities** had to pay **more than \$200K in fines**.³³ In 2022, **Global Execution Brokers**, in which SIG-related interests own a controlling interest, had to pay **\$150K in fines**.³⁴ In 2021, **G1X Holdings** was **fined \$575K and was forced to disgorge nearly \$900K of unjust profits**.³⁵ (Yass firms have a major stake in G1X since buying it as **e*trade** ten years ago when it was facing huge fines.³⁶)

Yass-tied trading groups have been fined more than 160 times by trading regulators and have paid more than \$10 million in fines.

In addition to regulatory action, SIG³⁷ and related groups have also been sued. For example, as the Hedge Clippers watchdog group explained, “SIG was one of several firms who settled a 2003 lawsuit brought by the **California Public Employee Retirement System (CALPERS)**, accusing the firm of using their knowledge of pending orders to execute trades ahead of their clients.... That suit resulted in an **\$18.5 million settlement by SIG and five other firms**.”³⁸

A few years after the CALPERS litigation began, the SEC investigated that trading pattern. **It then censured SIG, required it to disgorge**

\$6.37 million, and imposed a \$1.27 million civil penalty³⁹ after finding that SIG sequenced trades to its own advantage, harming its customers.

Yass Said What?! Stocks and derivatives are not SIG’s only interests. The firm also wants less regulation of cryptocurrency, like **Bitcoin**.⁴⁰ Yass has said “We want as much competition in currencies as possible.... [I]f the federal government loves their monopoly so much, that’s a violation of our basic freedoms.”⁴¹ But the U.S. Constitution granted Congress the power to “coin money [and] regulate the value thereof” to avoid the chaotic devaluation of competing state currencies that the Founders saw.

Why Does Betting on the Pennsylvania Supreme Court Matter?

The Pennsylvania Supreme Court issues decisions that affect Pennsylvanians’ daily lives and future, such as rulings on **working rights, voting rights, reproductive rights, school funding**, and more.

Workers Rights. It has jurisdiction over many issues affecting workers, including workers’ comp and the rights of unions and union members.

Voting Rights. In 2020, 14 of Trump’s 65 lawsuits challenging the election were filed in PA.⁴²

That year, the state’s highest court protected voters by stopping ballots of thousands of Pennsylvanians from being thrown out by then-lower court Judge **Kevin Brobson**, due to minor details like a signed envelope not being dated.⁴³ The following year, Yass spent almost \$2 million to get Brobson elected to a ten-year term on the Pennsylvania Supreme Court.

Fair Maps for Voting. In 2018, the state’s highest court rejected⁴⁴ voting maps after finding GOP legislators “plainly” violated the state constitution. MAGA Republicans in the statehouse then tried to impeach the justices,⁴⁵ and, failing that, they tried (and failed) to gerrymander judicial elections.⁴⁶

³⁹ <https://www.sec.gov/files/litigation/admin/2009/34-59506.pdf>

⁴⁰ <https://www.coindesk.com/business/2022/07/22/trading-firm-susquehanna-plots-bahamas-crypto-expansion-sources/>

⁴¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wncgxj7-e3w>

⁴² <https://www.democracymatters.com/analysis/whats-at-stake-in-pennsylvanias-state-supreme-court-race/>

⁴³

<https://www.pghcitypaper.com/news/meet-the-pa-commonwealth-court-judges-whove-recently-sided-with-republicans-on-election-rulings-only-to-be-overtaken-by-higher-courts-18492907>

⁴⁴ <https://why.org/articles/pennsylvania-supreme-court-strikes-congressional-district-map/>

⁴⁵ <https://www.npr.org/2018/03/22/596172829/pennsylvania-chief-justice-criticizes-impeachment-moves>

⁴⁶ <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2021/02/pennsylvania-judicial-gerrymander-bill.html>

³² <https://www.finra.org/investors/working-with-investment-professional/about-brokercheck>

³³ https://files.brokercheck.finra.org/firm/firm_35874.pdf

³⁴ https://files.brokercheck.finra.org/firm/firm_126407.pdf

³⁵ https://files.brokercheck.finra.org/firm/firm_111528.pdf

³⁶ https://files.brokercheck.finra.org/firm/firm_111528.pdf

³⁷ https://files.brokercheck.finra.org/firm/firm_33875.pdf

³⁸ <https://hedgeclippers.org/hedgepapers-no-11-high-frequency-hucksters/>

Abortion. After the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision in 2022 in *Dobbs* destroying federal constitutional protections for abortion, state courts are pivotal. Pennsylvania law protects access to abortion, but a change in court personnel could mean a change in precedent: all six U.S. Supreme Court justices confirmed with the aid of anti-abortion lawyer Leonard Leo told Americans they’d follow *Roe v. Wade*, but then overturned it. (Yass was last listed as a Planned Parenthood donor more than ten years ago.)

Pennsylvania has also been a focal point for anti-abortion groups trying to impose restrictions on abortion access and care. For example, in the late ‘80s, legislators tried to require a husband’s consent for an abortion and restrict access in other ways, which was struck down in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, which itself was overturned by the *Dobbs* ruling.

Yass Has Stakes in the Courts and an Agenda for Legal Policy

The Pennsylvania Supreme Court clearly matters to Yass, who has spent millions to support GOP-backed judicial candidates for state courts.

A search of the **Lexis** database shows that **Susquehanna International Group is mentioned in more than 1,400** briefs, pleadings, or motions filed in federal and state courts. His companies have also been a party in court cases involving **stock trading, taxes, pensions, and contracts.**

Yass’ main company is mentioned in more than 1,400 legal briefs, pleadings, and more.

What other legal policy issues matter to Yass? His voter affiliation is with the **Libertarian Party (LP)**,⁴⁷ whose platform has taken extreme positions for decades,⁴⁸ dating back to when it launched in the 1970s and then oil billionaire **Charles Koch** became its biggest funder⁴⁹ (and his brother, **David Koch**, ran as the LP’s candidate for Vice President⁵⁰). The LP’s platform includes **opposing the minimum wage, eliminating public schools, repealing taxes, opposing government insurance programs** (meaning **Medicare and Social Security**), **de-regulation**, and more.

⁴⁷ <https://www.lp.org/platform/>

⁴⁸ <https://kochdocs.org/2019/11/01/1979-koch-funded-libertarian-party-agenda-on-domestic-and-foreign-policy-issues/>

⁴⁹ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/feb/07/charles-koch-elections-billions-money-cash>

⁵⁰ <https://kochdocs.org/2019/08/30/david-koch-was-one-of-americas-most-powerful-politicians-though-never-elected/>

Health Insurance. Other groups Yass has infused with millions have sought to operationalize some of the LP’s extreme objectives. For example, by funding **Club for Growth (CFG)**, Yass has underwritten countless attacks on the **Affordable Care Act (ACA)**.⁵¹

CFG spent millions to repeal that law, which secures access to health care for one in ten Pennsylvanians, more than a million people who are not eligible for **Medicare**.⁵² It also ran ads endorsing candidates who pledged to repeal the ACA, an effort defeated by Democrats and Sen. **John McCain**.⁵³

Taxes. Yass’ companies have also litigated tax bills, which is their right. The Yass-funded CFG fought for the big tax breaks for the super wealthy that **Donald Trump** signed into law, a change in tax laws favoring the rich **the Kochs** called a “once-in-a-generation” opportunity.⁵⁴ Such cuts drove the deficit higher, but CFG endorsed the bill⁵⁵—showing how the deficit can be used to stoke fears of federal debt unless the uber rich benefit.⁵⁶ Yass has also objected to **progressive taxation**, taxing the rich more.

Through the *SIH Partners LLLP* case,⁵⁷ Yass’ firms also sought to overturn decades of regulations to reduce its tax bill. It argued that the **Chevron** doctrine should not apply to the regulations it challenged. Although the U.S. Supreme Court rejected SIG’s petition seeking to reverse its loss in this tax matter,⁵⁸ the Court is now considering a case to overturn *Chevron* and unsettle innumerable rules, which could aid Yass.⁵⁹

Yass Cash also Fuels Moving Money Away from Public Schools

The courts are also on the frontlines of a battle waged by an array of special interests to defund the public schools, attack teachers’ contracts, and even force taxpayers to subsidize private religious education—tearing down the American tradition of separation between church and state.

⁵¹ <https://www.axios.com/2017/12/15/club-for-growth-launches-anti-obamacare-ads-in-gop-moderate-districts-1513301509>

⁵² <https://www.insurance.pa.gov/siteassets/pages/default/aca%20fact%20sheet.pdf>

⁵³ <https://www.c-span.org/video/?431873-13/senator-mccain-votes-health-care-repeal>

⁵⁴ <https://theintercept.com/2017/07/26/koch-brothers-tax-reform-plan-grassroots-document/>

⁵⁵ <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/19/us/politics/tax-bill-vote-republicans.html>

⁵⁶ <https://publicintegrity.org/inequality-poverty-opportunity/taxes/trumps-tax-cuts/republicans-profit-congress/>

⁵⁷ <https://casetext.com/case/sih-partners-llp-v-commr>

⁵⁸

<https://www.taxnotes.com/tax-notes-international/litigation-and-appeals/sih-partners-certiorari-denied-dont-blame-guy-trying/202/10/2c4lm>

⁵⁹ <https://www.ucsusa.org/resources/west-virginia-vs-epa>

Yass is not just spending millions in the battles for the Pennsylvania Supreme Court; he has spent millions underwriting “school choice.”

That phrase has been used by various promoters to include an assortment of goals: taxpayer funding for public and/or privately-run charter schools, vouchers or what have been dubbed “Educational Savings Accounts” to pay for tuition at private or parochial schools, for-profit or non-profit virtual schools, home schooling, and other tactics for moving tax money away from traditional public schools. **Rupert Murdoch**, who created FOX News in 1996, has called U.S. public schools “a \$500 billion sector,” waiting for market forces to “transform”⁶⁰ it—that is, to exploit it. Hundreds of millions of Americans’ federal tax dollars have been directed to charters alone since 1992.

Yass has said he was urged to focus on “school choice” by libertarian economist **Milton Friedman**. Friedman famously objected to the U.S. Supreme Court’s ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*, urging that “government schools” be replaced by “free market” ones that could be racially segregated or “mixed,”⁶¹ based on parents’ desires, although the Court ruled that racially segregated public schools are unconstitutional.

Yass views “school choice” “as a gambler” and followed Milton Friedman’s advice.

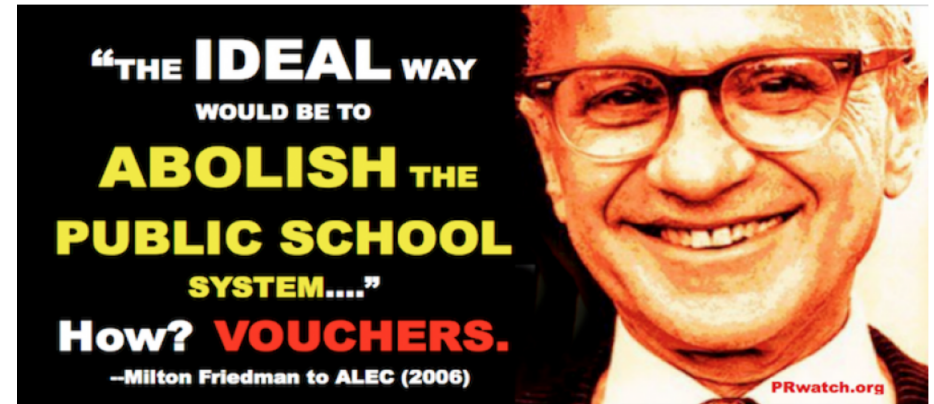
Yass Said What?! Recently, Yass relayed a story about a Cato Institute event in the 90’s where he asked for Friedman’s advice: “‘If you had a lot of philanthropic money, what would you do with it?’ And he said, ‘I would... fight for school choice. That’s the fundamental problem with the country. Nothing is more valuable than school choice.’ So as a gambler, I was like, well, I got to ask the guy who... has the best opinion. I want to bet with him. So it certainly made sense to me.... [It’s] pretty obvious that nothing could impact society as much as school choice.”⁶²

⁶⁰ <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2011/09/ruPERT-murdoch-news-corp-wireless-generation-education/>

⁶¹ <https://www.ineteconomics.org/perspectives/blog/how-milton-friedman-aided-and-abetted-segregationists-in-his-quest-to-privatize-public-education>

⁶² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wncgj7-e3w>

Yass Said What?! Yass also said it is “outrageous” that Americans supposedly ask “can I use my own money to go to a school?”⁶³ and they are supposedly told “No, you must go to a government union run school.” That depiction is not accurate. It also seems premised on the idea taxes are theft: rich people can pay private school tuition; and our taxes secure a universal public education for all kids, no matter their parent’s wealth.



“Privately conducted schools ... can develop exclusively white schools, exclusively colored schools, and mixed schools.”
—Milton Friedman, the year after *Brown v. Board*

(Illustration by Lisa Graves/True North Research.)

Friedman was libertarian extremism dressed up in a suit and tie.

Yass has noted that one of the books that influenced him most was Friedman’s “Capitalism and Freedom” (1962). In it, Friedman attacks public schools and universities as competing unfairly with the market. Yass has also branded university professors as anti-capitalist,⁶⁴ which echoes Charles Koch’s histrionic screeds against universities.⁶⁵ (Koch also underwrote attacks on compulsory schooling, leading to the book “The Twelve-Year Sentence,” featuring a kid in a mugshot on its cover.)

Yass and His Businesses Have Benefited from State Tax Credits for Donations that Fund Scholarships to Private or Parochial schools.

According to the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, **SIG** and businesses affiliated with Yass and two partners had given \$21 million for scholarships through multiple companies to the max cap, as of 2015,⁶⁶ benefiting them more

⁶³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wncgj7-e3w>

⁶⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wncgj7-e3w>

⁶⁵ <https://truenorthresearch.substack.com/p/how-one-rich-dude-targeted-colleges>

⁶⁶

https://www.inquirer.com/philly/news/politics/mayor/20150403_Mayoral_hopeful_Williams_hallmark_law_was_most_widely_used_by_his_supporters.html

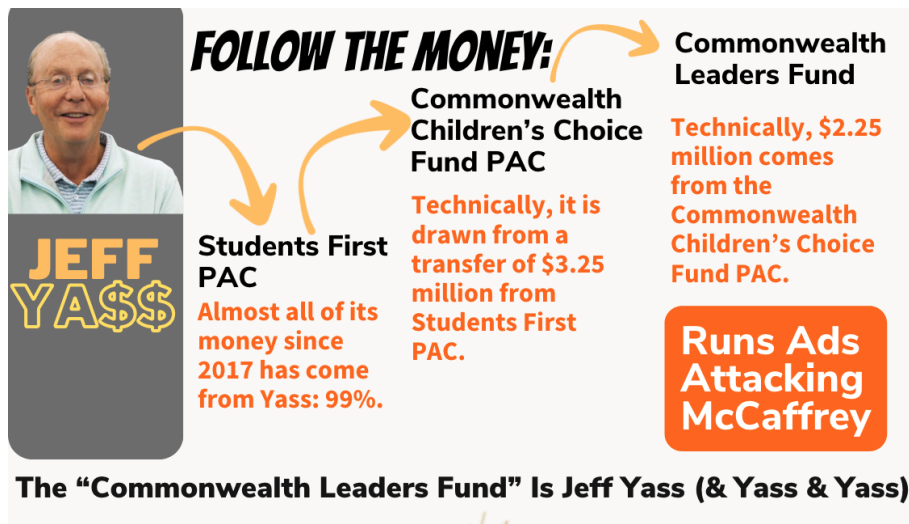
than most who do not have multiple companies. The state has allowed up to 90% of such donations to cut individual and company tax bills. Donors have said their aim is to help fund kids' tuition, not to benefit themselves.

How Does the Yass Cash for “School Choice”/Elections Work?

Yass is the biggest individual funder, by far, in the Pennsylvania judicial elections this year. As reported by *Spotlight PA*, Yass has contributed “one out of every three dollars” in Pennsylvania’s judicial elections so far in 2023.⁶⁷ The vast majority of that, \$2.1 million, has been spent to aid the candidate he backs for Pennsylvania’s high court: Judge Carluccio.

Notably, Yass’ political and issue operations that are tagged as “school choice” are fully intertwined. Yass is the main funder of two PACs—the “**Commonwealth Leaders Fund**” and “**Commonwealth Children’s Choice Fund**”—via a third PAC: **Students First**. The Commonwealth Leaders Fund is the one running ads attacking Carluccio’s opponent, Judge McCaffery.⁶⁸ Those attack ads do not list Yass as their funding source; campaign laws do not require the original funder to be listed.

The shell game that obscures his name from attack ads goes like this:



(Editorial illustration by Lisa Graves/True North Research. Image of Yass from corporate Vimeo video.)

In total, Yass has given \$61.6 million out of the \$61.95 million that Students First PAC has received since 2017. Less than 1% came from a handful of Yass’ friends in business. The arrangement basically throws his voice through three front groups, but it’s really Yass, Yass, and Yass.

How Is this Structured? The Commonwealth Leaders Fund and the Commonwealth Children’s Choice Fund operate within the offices of the “**Commonwealth Partners Chamber of Entrepreneurs**,” a non-profit trade group. It is run by Matt Brouillette, who launched the group in 2016 and first met Yass earlier in the 2000s, according to *Spotlight PA*. Brouillette has extolled “the need for the profit motive in education.”⁶⁹

He previously led the **Commonwealth Foundation**, a special interest group that is part of the **State Policy Network**. SPN was launched from the right-wing **Heritage Foundation** to sell the pay-to-play legislative agenda of ALEC, the **Americans Legislative Exchange Council**, as state or locally driven. He was also with the anti-union **Mackinac Center**.

Commonwealth Leaders Fund has already spent >\$2.1 million from Yass in the 2023 Pennsylvania Supreme Court race, so far.

Commonwealth Partners spends aggressively to advance Yass’ wishlists on “school choice,” but that is not the only issue it opines on. It has also assailed efforts to increase **the minimum wage**,⁷⁰ consistent with Yass’ view. Meanwhile, Commonwealth Partners pays Brouillette a base salary of more than \$350K a year, in addition to a \$150K bonus in 2021 and other benefits. His group also controls an LLC that owns a million-dollar building across from the state capitol in Harrisburg. The PACs pay it rent.

“Production” via Yass Cash—They’ve Run This Playbook Before. As with this year’s Supreme Court race, in 2021 the Commonwealth Leaders Fund was the biggest donor to the GOP candidate for the state’s highest court, **Judge Kevin Brobson**. His campaign was fueled by Yass cash totaling nearly \$2 million, providing in-kind services like “production” and

⁶⁷ <https://www.spotlightpa.org/news/2023/10/pennsylvania-judicial-court-elections-jeff-yass-campaign-finance/>

⁶⁸ <https://www.spotlightpa.org/news/2023/10/pennsylvania-judicial-court-elections-jeff-yass-campaign-finance/>

⁶⁹ <https://thecommonwealthpartners.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Reclaiming-Public-Education-3-14-16.pdf>

⁷⁰ <https://thecommonwealthpartners.com/2023/03/15/news-brews-march-15-2023/>

media. His opponent, **Judge Maria McLaughlin**, was supported by union workers and lawyers. Brobson won. That playbook is back now in 2023.

The Commonwealth Leaders Fund also operationalized Yass cash to try to secure wins in 2022, 2020, and 2018. According to WHYY/PBS, “Yass put millions into Brouillette’s PACs in the lead-up to the 2020 election, and Brouillette told *The Philadelphia Inquirer* that he and Yass had a signed agreement that he could use the money however he wanted.”⁷¹

Other Yass Fortune Spending on “School Choice” Promotion

Notably, Yass and his wife, Janine, run a program to reward people who are disrupting the public school system, with million dollar “**Yass Prizes**.” Through his companies, Jeff Yass has also funded “**Choice Academics**,” a charity run by his wife to fund scholarships (it is now called the “**Boys Latin Foundation**”). He also backed politicians who changed the law to allow scholarship gifts to create tax credits that businesses benefit from.

In 2007, Janine Yass helped launch the “**Boys Latin of Philadelphia Charter School**.” That charter has won praise for its performance, but a recent study by the non-profit “**Children First**” found that most state charters fail to perform better than public schools in math and in other ways. The **Center for Popular Democracy** also found that PA charter school operators had defrauded at least \$30 million in funds for kids.

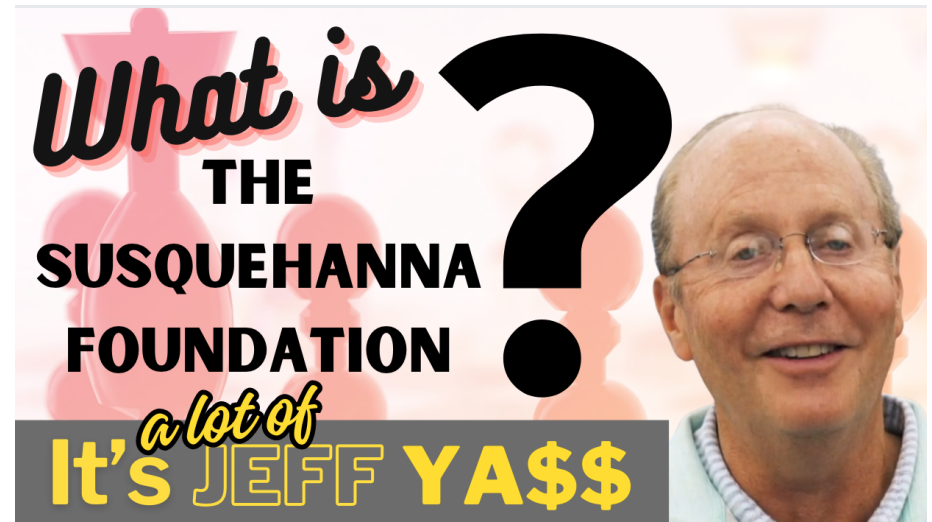
The Yass-directed **Susquehanna Foundation** has given millions to “school choice” groups and anti-union efforts. (He is Vice President of the Board of that foundation; his business partners are also on the board.)

In 2021, the Susquehanna Foundation gave more than **\$2.3 million** to the **Center for Education Reform** (Janine Yass is on the board). It has also given more than **\$15 million** to the **Philadelphia Schools Project**, and funded various charter schools as well as Friedman’s “**EdChoice**.”

Yass Said What?! Yass has called public schools a “government-run monopoly” that we “must get rid of,”⁷² channeling Friedman. Yass has also used other incendiary rhetoric, like telling the public that the “teachers’ union confiscates [poor families’ money] and takes it away from them.” That is not an accurate depiction of school funding.

⁷¹ <https://whyy.org/articles/jeff-yass-the-richest-man-in-pa-is-single-handedly-keeping-school-choice-pacs-flush/>

⁷² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wncgj7-e3w>



(Editorial illustration by Lisa Graves/True North Research. Image of Yass from corporate Vimeo video.)

Yass has also sought to influence school policy through other vehicles.⁷³ When “Strong Economy for Growth” had to disclose donors on a Boston “school choice” ballot, Yass was revealed as a major funder of “QXZ Inc.”

Two other groups tied to SIG’s then-chief financial officer, **Brian Sullivan**, funded “school choice” efforts, too: 1) **Green Orchard** gave \$863K to a New York group lobbying for “a tax credit for contributions to private education like charter schools.”⁷⁴ Notably, when Green Orchard gave \$250K to a Super PAC run by the Cato Institute’s long-time leader **Ed Crane** his PAC reported that amount as a gift from Yass but no gifts from Green Orchard.⁷⁵ Yass has been on Crane’s board at Cato for years.

2) Not only did Sullivan’s **Rosebush Corp.** fund “school choice,” it also, as Robert McGuire found, gave \$100K to the **Wellspring Committee**,⁷⁶ a dark money group that was central to funding **Leonard Leo**-tied groups. As detailed by Heidi Przybyla at *Politico*,⁷⁷ this was around the time in 2011 that the Wellspring Committee began funding the dormant **Judicial Education Project**, just as JEP began secretly paying **Ginni Thomas** as arranged by **Leo**. (The original funder(s) of her secret pay is not public.)

⁷³ <https://www.bostonherald.com/2018/01/02/bay-state-nonprofit-penalized-for-violating-campaign-finance-law/>

⁷⁴ https://www.huffpost.com/entry/on-the-trail-to-find-out-who-is-behind-two-dark-money-groups_n_55cfe24e4b064d5910af11e

⁷⁵ https://www.huffpost.com/entry/on-the-trail-to-find-out-who-is-behind-two-dark-money-groups_n_55cfe24e4b064d5910af11e

⁷⁶ <https://www.opensecrets.org/news/2015/01/in-the-garden-of-dark-money-the-thorny-case-of-rosebush-corp/>

⁷⁷ <https://www.politico.com/news/2023/09/10/ginni-thomas-leonard-leo-citizens-united-00108082>

Before it wound down, in 2012, Rosebush gave \$2 million to “**Americans for Job Security**” as it was fighting President **Obama**’s re-election.⁷⁸ **AJS** was a pass-through for the Kochs’ “dark money man,” **Sean Noble**.⁷⁹ The FEC and California later fined Noble and some Koch-tied groups for election violations, although they all stated that they did nothing wrong.⁸⁰

Yass has called public schools a “government-run monopoly” that we must “get rid of....”

Rosebush also gave money to billionaire **Betsy DeVos**’ **American Federation for Children**, another “school choice” and anti-union group. When Trump named her Education Secretary, Janine Yass endorsed her.⁸¹ DeVos’ husband, Dick, said he and his wife are not opposed to public education, just public schools.⁸² Betsy DeVos, who is a major GOP funder, has described using their family fortune on political spending as using her and Dick’s asserted right to speak “as loudly as we please.”⁸³

Club for Growth Is Another Yass Cash-Filled Pressure Group

Yass has directed **more than \$60 million to Club for Growth Action since 2018**, and hundreds of thousands in the years before that. He is one of the group’s biggest funders since CFG was launched by right-wing economist **Stephen Moore** in the late 1990s. Notably, an early member of CFG’s “founders committee” of donors was **Harlan Crow**, a big GOP underwriter.⁸⁴ Crow is now widely known as the billionaire giving luxury trips and more⁸⁵ to U.S. Supreme Court Justice **Clarence Thomas**.⁸⁶

Yass has also given CFG more than any other billionaire this year: **\$15 million**, almost half of its budget. Other top donors in 2023 include:

- **Dick Uihlein**, who funded **#stopthesteal** groups that sought to overturn the 2020 election and were stoking Jan. 6 events;⁸⁷

- **Thomas Klingenstein**, a key defender of the **Claremont Institute’s John Eastman**, who wrote Trump the memos to help orchestrate overturning the 2020 presidential election;⁸⁸ and
- **Virginia James**, who failed to overturn caps on direct donations to federal candidates.

In recent years, Yass and Uihlein have become CFG’s largest donors.⁸⁹



(Editorial illustration by Lisa Graves/True North Research. Image of Yass from corporate Vimeo video. Image of Uihlein from corporate Youtube video.)

CFG recently announced that it is planning to spend \$20 million to aid the re-election of what it described as “the Patriot 20” list.⁹⁰ Those are the 20 Republicans who voted against Rep. **Kevin McCarthy** to be Speaker of the House. In October, McCarthy was ousted after reaching a bipartisan agreement on a short-term extension of the **debt ceiling** to prevent the first-ever default by the U.S., which would harm ordinary Americans.⁹¹

In 2018 and 2020, CFG “spent \$20m supporting 42 rightwing lawmakers who voted to invalidate the Biden victory,” according to *the Guardian*.⁹² CFG’s “Patriot” list includes some of the most vocal election deniers in Congress, like Reps. **Matt Gaetz**, **Andy Biggs**, and **Lauren Boebert**.

⁷⁸ <https://www.opensecrets.org/news/2015/01/in-the-garden-of-dark-money-the-thorny-case-of-rosebush-corp/>

⁷⁹ <https://www.propublica.org/article/the-dark-money-man-how-sean-noble-moved-the-kochs-cash-into-politics-and-ma>

⁸⁰ <https://www.prwatch.org/news/2017/01/13204/marc-short-koch-dark-money-operative-trump-legislative-director>

⁸¹ <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/devos-isnt-opposed-to-public-education-she-opposes-failing-schools>

⁸² <https://www.commondreams.org/views/2016/11/27/5-things-know-about-billionaire-betsy-devos-trump-education-choice>

⁸³ <https://www.commondreams.org/views/2016/11/27/5-things-know-about-billionaire-betsy-devos-trump-education-choice>

⁸⁴ <https://web.archive.org/web/2001129115033/http://clubforgrowth.org/>

⁸⁵ <https://www.propublica.org/article/clarence-thomas-harlan-crow-private-school-tuition-scotus>

⁸⁶ <https://www.propublica.org/article/clarence-thomas-harlan-crow-real-estate-scotus>

⁸⁷

<https://wisconsinexaminer.com/brief/uihleins-owners-of-wisconsin-company-gave-millions-to-group-sponsoring-the-jan-6-march-or-trump/>

⁸⁸ <https://newrepublic.com/article/163981/claremont-john-eastman-coup-memo>

⁸⁹ <https://www.fec.gov/legal-resources/court-cases/james-v-fec/>

⁹⁰ <https://www.politico.com/news/2023/07/24/club-for-growth-fund-boebert-gaetz-00107755>

⁹¹ <https://www.kcra.com/article/why-kevin-mccarthy-ousted-house-speaker/45434269>

⁹² <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/jan/15/trump-republicans-election-defeat-club-for-growth>

CFG has also deployed other tactics to give candidates a campaign-like issue event platform where they can attack public schools. That program has featured pro-charter school CFGers like Sen. **Ted Cruz**, who tried to block certification in the Senate on Jan. 6, and **Adam Laxalt**, who tried to help Trump overturn the 2020 election in Nevada.⁹³ Those “school choice” events operate under the brand the “**School Freedom Fund**.”

Yass has given Club for Growth more than \$60 million since 2018 to help win elections.

That brand is also the name of the PAC that CFG sometimes uses to run attack ads against political candidates it dislikes or for those it prefers. Yass previously gave the School Freedom Fund PAC \$15 million, which spent \$600K supporting Laxalt. In the 2022 race, Uihlein also backed Laxalt, who lost to Sen. **Catherine Cortez Masto**, a Democrat.

In a statement to *Forbes* that year, CFG’s School Freedom Fund leader defended its support for Laxalt and others saying “it makes decisions about which candidates to support based on their position on school choice” and has supported politicians “on both sides of the election certification issue.”⁹⁴ And a Yass spokesperson told *Forbes*, he “is a self-described never-Trumper who has never questioned or denied the results of the 2020 election.”⁹⁵ Since 2015, CFG has waffled between opposing Trump and supporting him and is now seeking alternatives.⁹⁶

Ten million of Yass’ \$15 million donation to CFG this year was described as funding to seek an alternative to **Trump** as the GOP nominee.⁹⁷ This year, CFG featured **Ron DeSantis** at its donor soiree at the Breakers resort in Florida, while Trump was headlining the CPAC meeting in DC.

Is Yass Hedging His Bets?! Yass also gave \$2.5 million this year to a PAC backing **Ron DeSantis**, whom Uihlein has funded.⁹⁸ Yass has been warm toward **Andrew Yang**,⁹⁹ who may run as a third party spoiler. He

⁹³ <https://www.reviewjournal.com/news/politics-and-government/cruz-laxalt-back-school-choice-at-las-vegas-event-2621333/>

⁹⁴ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kylemullins/2022/08/04/these-two-billionaires-are-helping-bankroll-an-election-denier-in-nevadas-senate-race/?sh=14d6bc425866>

⁹⁵ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kylemullins/2022/08/04/these-two-billionaires-are-helping-bankroll-an-election-denier-in-nevadas-senate-race/?sh=14d6bc425866>

⁹⁶ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2022/05/16/club-for-growth-trump-barnette-oz/>

⁹⁷ <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-07-20/billionaire-jeff-yass-gives-10-million-to-anti-trump-group>

⁹⁸ <https://www.cnn.com/2023/02/22/politics/ron-desantis-donors/index.html>

⁹⁹ <https://www.inquirer.com/columnists/attytood/jeff-yass-andrew-yang-new-york-city-mayor-20210525.html>

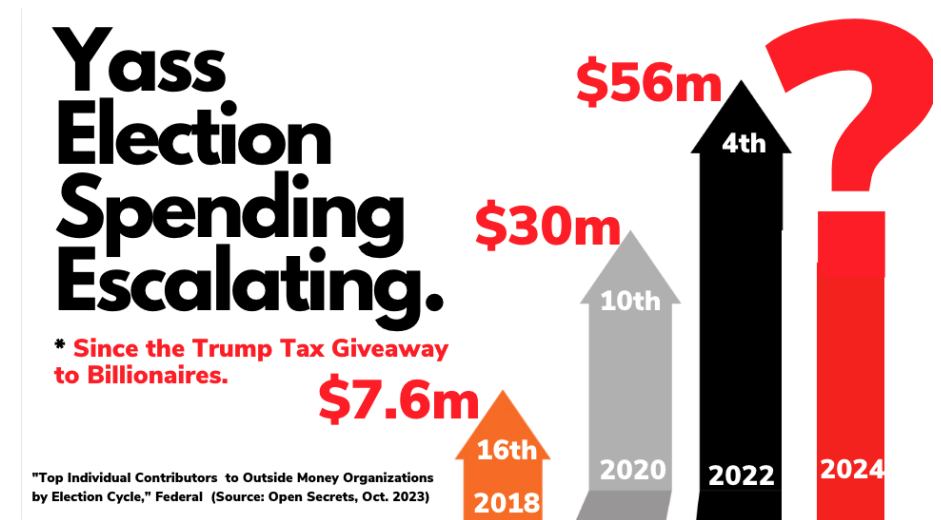
also sent money this year to Virginia Gov. **Glenn Youngkin**’s PAC.¹⁰⁰ In 2021, “**The Moderate PAC**” began targeting progressive candidates in the 2022 Democratic primaries. Who staked it with \$1m? Yass.

Yass Election Spending Skyrocketed after Trump Tax Cuts

Over the past three election cycles since Trump signed into law what Koch called “once in a generation” tax cuts—the tax giveaway that greatly benefited billionaires—Yass’ spending in elections has grown dramatically.

In the three election cycles from the 2018 to 2022 the disclosed money that Yass has given to outside groups¹⁰¹ to influence federal elections has increased more than sevenfold, from \$7 million to more than \$50 million.

In the 2022 congressional midterm elections, Yass was the fourth largest funder of outside groups,¹⁰² behind **Ken Griffin**, **Uihlein**, and **George Soros**, putting Yass in the winner’s circle of top three GOP mega-donors.



"Top Individual Contributors to Outside Money Organizations by Election Cycle," Federal (Source: Open Secrets, Oct. 2023)

(Illustration by Lisa Graves/True North Research.)

¹⁰⁰

<https://www.wric.com/news/politics/capitol-connection/democrats-cry-foul-after-gov-youngkins-political-action-committee-receives-2-million-donation-from-wealthy-tiktok-investor/>

¹⁰¹ <https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-features/tiktok-billionaire-yass-gop-donor-abortion-1234859270/>

¹⁰² <https://www.opensecrets.org/elections-overview/biggest-donors?cycle=2022&view=om>

In Pennsylvania, for years, Yass has been the biggest individual spender in elections. And he has already spent nearly \$2 million this year to try to add another Republican to Pennsylvania’s Supreme Court.

The Court has a 4-2 split. **Judge Brobson**, Yass’ bet in 2021, is in the minority. In 2025, three of the judges who won Democratic primaries a decade ago will face retention elections and one is nearing mandatory retirement age.¹⁰³ These races could flip the highest court to the GOP through the year 2035, a period that includes two presidential elections plus electoral maps to be drawn after the 2030 census. Gambling on the courts is a long game.

Yass Has Deep Ties to Cato, which Has Targeted the Courts

Since 2002 Yass has also had a seat at the table of the Board of the Cato Institute and is now its vice-chair. Cato was launched by **Charles Koch** in the 70’s to advance his libertarian legal policy agenda, like **privatizing Social Security and public schools**.¹⁰⁴ Yass has become one of its largest donors, giving almost as much as Koch’s charity annually.

While Yass has been on the Board, Cato has been increasing its participation in briefs to the U.S. Supreme Court. Koch helped fund **Leonard Leo’s** ambition¹⁰⁵ to pack the Court with **Federalist Society** judges. Leo handpicked **Trump’s** candidates—and grew wealthier too.

For example, Cato filed an amicus brief in 2009 in the **Citizens United** case, where the Court struck down the **McCain-Feingold** campaign money reforms. **Clarence Thomas** participated in that 5-4 ruling even though his billionaire benefactor was staking¹⁰⁶ his wife, **Ginni**, in a group to exploit that decision. The ruling unleashed a tsunami of **dark money**.

Cato also joined right-wing efforts to assail crucial enforcement provisions of the **Voting Rights Act** (VRA) that were adopted due to courageous leadership by the **Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.**, and the millions of Americans who joined in the civil rights movement. Notably, **Charles**

Koch himself funded¹⁰⁷ the **John Birch Society**—and even led the Wichita chapter—as it relentlessly assailed King and **Rosa Parks** as communists.¹⁰⁸ In 2013, as Cato sought, Chief Justice **John Roberts** struck down VRA protections Congress had recently extended, and the U.S. Supreme Court let loose a new era of **GOP voter suppression** bills.

Cato has filed numerous other amicus briefs, such as one attacking state agency power to receive information about **secret donors**, in **Bonta**, a case filed by Koch’s Americans for Prosperity. In another recent case against the EPA, Cato filed a brief attacking the Obama administration’s **Clean Power Plan** which sought to mitigate earth’s **climate change**.

Notably, Cato has also submitted a brief in a new case called **Loper Bright**, where litigation by **Cause of Action**—stacked with lawyers whose day job is working for the Koch network on policy—is trying to overturn the **Chevron** rule that requires judicial deference to agency expertise.

In recent years, Yass has directed **\$3 million** a year to Cato through the **Susquehanna Foundation**. Among other things, it has also given **\$500K** annually to the **Institute for Justice** (IFJ), where one of Yass’ long-time business partners, Arthur Dantchik, sits on the board. Susquehanna also funds the Koch-infused **Atlas Network**, which exports libertarian goals.

The **CLAWS Foundation**, which has Dantchik on its Board along with Yass, has also given hundreds of thousands to Cato, IFJ, and Atlas, in addition to funding **Milton Friedman’s “Free to Choose.”**

Is the Effort to Change the Israeli Supreme Court a Harbinger?

Watchdog groups¹⁰⁹ and investigative reporters¹¹⁰ in Israel helped uncover and detail how CLAWS had been using pass-through groups to channel money to change the rules for the Supreme Court of Israel. That funding aided Prime Minister Netanyahu’s campaign to restructure the Israel Supreme Court. Both Dantchik and Yass are directors on the Board of CLAWS. Dantchik is its major donor; Yass reportedly is not.

¹⁰⁷

<https://www.prwatch.org/news/2016/01/13017/how-charles-koch-backed-john-birch-society-height-its-attacks-martin-luther-king>

¹⁰⁸

<https://www.exposedbycmd.org/2016/01/18/how-charles-koch-backed-the-john-birch-society-at-the-height-of-its-attacks-on-martin-luther-king/>

¹⁰⁹ <https://www.shomrim.news/eng/danchik-kohelet>

¹¹⁰

<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2021-03-11/ty-article-magazine/.highlight/the-u-s-billionaires-secretly-funding-the-right-wing-effort-to-reshape-israel/0000017f-e90c-da9b-a1ff-ed6f5dd30000>

¹⁰³ <https://why.org/articles/pennsylvania-election-2023-judicial-retention-superior-court-common-pleas/>

¹⁰⁴ https://www.inthepublicinterest.org/wp-content/uploads/ITPI_USPSPrivatization_July2020.pdf

¹⁰⁵

<https://truenorthresearch.org/2020/10/background-er-on-the-supreme-court-judge-amy-barrett-trump-advisor-leonard-leo-and-bill-onaire-charles-koch/>

¹⁰⁶ <https://www.politico.com/news/2023/09/10/ginni-thomas-leonard-leo-citizens-united-00108082>

Investigators tracked how their foundation sent millions through the **Silver Valley Research Foundation (SVRF)**, which describes itself as devoted to medical research. SVRF then sent millions to the New York-based **Central Fund of Israel**, which then sent millions to the **Kohelet Policy Forum** in Israel. Kohelet has played a key role in proposals to limit the power of Israel's highest court in ways sought by right-wing Prime Minister **Benjamin Netanyahu**.

While Netanyahu has been facing litigation over allegations of corruption, he has been working with Kohelet to **change the rules for removing a prime minister** and to limit the court's jurisdiction in dramatic ways. For example, at Netanyahu's urging and in accord with some of Kohelet's proposals, the Israeli legislature (the Knesset) adopted a measure that **sought to abolish the Court's power to review laws for their "reasonableness."** These actions have spawned weeks and weeks of public protests with thousands of Israelis engaging in demonstrations.

In the U.S., activists protested Dantchik's role in these radical efforts to limit checks and balances, and he agreed to stop funding Kohelet.¹¹¹ There appears to be no comparable funding from CLAWS, however, to undo the damage to judicial independence that it helped set in motion.

Leonard Leo Has also Targeted the Pennsylvania Court

Yass is not the only one with billion-dollar resources who has moved money to influence who wins Pennsylvania Supreme Court races. A newly minted billion-dollar trust fund was recently created by Chicago billionaire **Barre Seid** to support right-wing lawyer and **Federalist Society** leader **Leonard Leo**¹¹² in his efforts to capture (as described by Senator Sheldon Whitehouse¹¹³) the U.S. Supreme Court, state supreme courts, and other key legal levers.

Like Yass, Seid has also been a funder of **Cato** and the **Federalist Society**. Leo's new trust fund, which is called the **Marble Freedom Trust** and has more than \$1.6 billion, was first uncovered last year.¹¹⁴



(Illustration by Lisa Graves/True North Research.)

Leo can now use Marble to move money through other groups in his dark money network to influence state supreme court elections.

The main way Leo has done this in prior years has been through the Leo-tied **Concord Fund**, which is widely known as JCN, the **Judicial Crisis Network**.¹¹⁵ For years, Concord/JCN has been transferring hundreds of thousands of dollars, often around a million dollars, to the **Republican State Leadership Committee (RSLC)**.¹¹⁶

In short order, RSLC then transfers a similar amount to the **Judicial Fairness Initiative**, a legally separate arm of RSLC, making RSLC JFI's only disclosed funder. RSLC-JFI then reserves ad time and creates ads about a month before the general election, but cuts the checks or transfers cash to vendors a week before election day, filing spending reports then.

True North Research calls this tactic the "**million-dollar cash bomb**," scorching the opponents of GOP-aligned judicial candidates who cannot themselves raise enough money—and have little time—to counter such attacks. RSLC-JFI's candidates sometimes win, by narrow margins.

¹¹¹ <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2023-08-08/ty-article-magazine/.premium/how-30-israelis-in-philly-got-u-s-billionaire-to-stop-funding-the-kohelet-policy-forum/00000189-d08b-ddac-a3cd-f5fb88480000>

¹¹² <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2019/investigations/leonard-leo-federalists-society-courts/>

¹¹³ https://www.whitehouse.senate.gov/news/speeches/scheme-18_leonard-leos-16-billion-payday

¹¹⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/22/us/politics/republi-can-dark-money.html> and <https://www.propublica.org/article/dark-money-leonard-leo-barre-seid>

¹¹⁵ <https://truenorthresearch.org/report/wisconsin-supreme-court-capture-leonard-leo-tied-dark-money-judicial-crisis-network-rslc/>

¹¹⁶ <https://truenorthresearch.org/2023/03/leonard-leo-tied-republican-state-leadership-committee-aids-kelly/>

PA Case Study. In 2021, as Yass was spending nearly \$2 million to help Judge Brobson in his bid for the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, RSLC-JFI was spending too. It executed its playbook, spending more than \$1.6 million in total on independent expenditures to aid the election of Brobson, who had won the GOP primary with a push from RSLC-JFI.

Afterward, RSLC-JFI noted it spent “\$250,000 in the primary, including polling and a cable television buy.”¹¹⁷ It took credit for helping to sweep Brobson to victory by spending “\$1.375 million in the general election on polling, broadcast and cable TV, and text messaging,”¹¹⁸ including TV ads that ran in the Philadelphia, Harrisburg, Pittsburgh, and Scranton and the Wilkes-Barre media markets. Its ads portrayed Brobson’s opponent as soft on crime, a typical tactic of RSLC and others on the right, too.

Wisconsin Case Study. RSLC-JFI deployed a similar playbook in Wisconsin in 2019, turning the tide for Judge **Brian Hagedorn**, who won by 5,000 votes after trailing in polls for most of that campaign. It bragged that:

“Going into the final week of the election, RSLC... found Judge Brian Hagedorn to be down by 8 points.... [W]e identified that Judge Hagedorn’s biggest challenge was that he was not winning among Republicans as much as his opponent was winning among Democrats. Equalizing the partisan intensity made this a two point race. The RSLC data team identified a large number of Republican turnout targets. These voters were highly likely to support Republicans and had not consistently voted in April judicial elections JFI implemented this strategy through targeted digital ads, tv ads on conservative cable networks, radio ads, mail, and text messaging [including] three targeted mail pieces to voters in targeted households. We also sent 1.2 million GOTV text messages to an audience of low-propensity, conservative voters over the last few days of the election.”¹¹⁹

Notably, RSLC-JFI backed Carluccio with a \$600K ad buy in May during the primary, one day before Leo’s Concord/JCN gave RSLC \$150,000 (after the Wisconsin race was long concluded). RSLC-JFI has not yet run ads in the coming general election in Pennsylvania, but that is consistent with the playbook it previously deployed in the state.

¹¹⁷ <https://www.rslc.gop/press-releases/rslc-jfi-congratulates-judge-kevin-brobson-on-election-to-pennsylvanias-supreme-court>
¹¹⁸ <https://www.rslc.gop/press-releases/rslc-jfi-congratulates-judge-kevin-brobson-on-election-to-pennsylvanias-supreme-court>

¹¹⁹ <https://web.archive.org/web/20200426203738/https://www.rslc.gop/news/2019/04/04/how-the-rslc-jfi-helped-win-the-wisconsin-supreme-court-race/>

Like Yass, Billionaire Uihlein Is also Targeting the Courts

Earlier this year, Uihlein also spent lavishly¹²⁰ to try to help right-wing allies¹²¹ maintain a controlling majority on the Wisconsin Supreme Court. Abortion rights are at stake there, like everywhere. That court has also helped protect the GOP’s deeply distorted legislative voting maps.

In Wisconsin, a Democrat can win statewide office and become a governor, state Attorney General, or U.S. Senator because the voting map is the entire state, uncut by unfair maps.¹²² But, when the GOP-controlled state legislature draws the maps for legislative elections, those maps have resulted in minority rule, where a turnout of a minority of state GOP voters dominate election results, creating false majority margins for the GOP in the state legislature and in the congressional delegation.



(Editorial illustration by Lisa Graves/True North Research. Image of Uihlein from corporate Youtube video.)

Earlier in 2023, through Fair Courts America (FCA), Uihlein spent millions to try to help **Dan Kelly** win a race for the Wisconsin Supreme Court. Kelly lost to Judge **Janet Protasiewicz**. He raised relatively little for his own campaign because, he said, he was counting on those who were interested in the courts to spend copiously.¹²³ FCA/Uihlein did. Notably, earlier this year, the Yass-fueled **Commonwealth Leaders Fund** sent \$100K to “**Foundation for Fair Courts LLC**,” an entity tied to FCA.

¹²⁰ <https://truenorthresearch.org/2023/02/snapshot-of-dick-uhlein-and-his-fair-courts-america-attack-ad-machine/>

¹²¹ <https://americanindependent.com/uhlein-money-daniel-kelly-wisconsin-supreme-court/>

¹²² <https://www.vox.com/voting-rights/2023/8/3/23818858/wisconsin-gerrymander-clarke-wisconsin-election-commission-supreme-court-janet-protasiewicz>

¹²³ <https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/politics/elections/2023/02/16/wisconsin-supreme-court-candidate-dan-kelly-touts-special-interest-dollars/69900662007/>

How Are Concerned People Responding to the Escalating Spending by Yass to Influence Elections and Public Policy?

In Pennsylvania, numerous community groups have come together as part of a multi-racial interfaith alliance to respond to concerns about the exceptional influence of one person on Pennsylvania's laws. The alliance has held rallies and organized under #ALLEYESONYASS, for example. A list of such community resources is provided below. Nationally, numerous watchdog and transparency groups have also created tools and other resources to track and expose special interest spending. There is also a brand new interactive site from Spotlight PA: "Why Judges Matter."¹²⁴

Note: being listed below does not signify endorsement of this report.

RESOURCES–Pennsylvania

- **1Hood Power**
 - <https://1hoodpower.org/>
- **Free the Ballot**
 - <https://freetheballot.org/>
- **Keystone Newsroom**
 - <https://keystonenewsroom.com/>
- **Make the Road PA**
 - <https://www.maketheroadpa.org/>
- **PA Stands Up**
 - <https://pastandsup.org/>
- **Power Interfaith**
 - <https://powerinterfaith.org/>
- **Reclaim Philadelphia**
 - <https://www.reclaimphiladelphia.org/>
- **Spotlight PA**
 - <https://www.spotlightpa.org/>

Resources–National

- **Action Center on Race and the Economy**
 - <https://acrecampaigns.org/>
- **Brennan Center**
 - <https://www.brennancenter.org/>
 - <https://statecourtreport.org/>
- **Center for Media and Democracy**
 - <https://www.exposedbycmd.org/>
- **Democracy Docket**
 - <https://www.democracymarket.com/>
- **HedgeClippers**
 - <https://hedgeclippers.org/>
- **Little Sis**
 - <https://littlesis.org/>
- **OpenSecrets**
 - <https://www.opensecrets.org/>
- **ProPublica nonprofit explorer**
 - <https://projects.propublica.org/nonprofits>
- **Public Citizen**
 - <https://www.citizen.org/>
- **ReThink Media**
 - <https://rethinkmedia.org/>

