Viewpoint: Pay to play? Leading anti-biotechnology front group USRTK hides almost all of its ‘dark money’ donors

In the introduction to this Firebreak series on how foundations fund activists, I noted there were a wide variety of foundations: from generous endowments to publicly funded humanitarian organizations to donor-advised money mills. Many do due diligence and cooperate with their recipients to ensure that the funds are well used. The money mills, though, just take money from a secret donor or interest group, wash it clean of any fingerprints, and, according to the advice of the donor, pass it on to the targeted recipient (minus a hefty laundering fee for the fund manager).

Donor-advised funds allow activist groups to receive unlimited donations from undisclosed sources. This is important in cases where an NGO, activist, researcher or tort law firm is acting on behalf of the interests of the funders (ie, shilling) and where disclosure of the source might discredit the campaign outcome or reveal a conflict of interest. It allows the NGOs to more easily deceive their public.

This non-disclosure is a sacred part of the donor-advised money mill. If a donor with an interest has no problem having the donation made public, then the funds would be given directly to the recipient rather than paying fees to have the financial source “purified”. It is essentially dark money but unlike mob money in brown envelopes, it is tax deductible. Donor-advised funds are not at all transparent, deceptive and, I would argue, unethical. Since it hides sources of influence, it should be illegal.

In the case of the NGO, US Right to Know, we can also add: hypocritical.

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US Right to Dark Money

The US Right to Know NGO grew out of the failed 2014 Just Label It campaign that demanded transparency and openness on GMOs. They campaign for the right to know who is funding research, organizations and lobbying campaigns and spend their research budget trying to expose companies and industry group activities. Their key objective is to destroy corporations, so they have worked intensely with a large number of US tort law firms, especially around the glyphosate lawsuits and the diffusion of the Monsanto Papers.

As they run anti-capitalist, anti-industry campaigns on behalf of their funders, US Right to Know have mostly focused on exposing pesticides, chemicals, food and pharmaceutical industries. They did try to be transparent on their funding at first but received a lot of criticism as most of their funds came from the organic food industry lobby and some anti-vaccine foundations. Now they are pretending to publish their revenue sources, but almost all of it is dark, donor-advised fund money.

In other words, we really don’t know who is now funding this pack of wolves and can only guess according to the campaigns US Right to Know are hired to run. I suspect a lot of money comes from the equally
opaque tort law industry, not only in return for the relentless, pro bono support Carey Gillam gave on the
glyphosate-Monsanto trials but also for running the recent public outrage grooming campaigns against
Coke in the wake of the IARC aspartame cancer study publication.

Could Gary and Stacy be getting Russian money? Who knows. They used to be regulars on Russia
Today.

The graphic below shows how dark and cloudy the US Right to Know’s funding has become over the last
two years. As they do not have to declare who their actual sources are, it is left to the imagination which
interest groups want this “pay-to-slay” NGO to act on their behalf. The one takehome though is that the
next time these self-righteous activists cry about undisclosed corporate funding, the word “hypocrite"
should be uttered.
U.S. Right to Know major donors (contributions over $5k)

2023
National Philanthropic Trust – Adadevoh Memorial Fund: $162,000 Donor-Advised "Dark" Fund
Chicago Community Foundation: $75,000 Donor-Advised "Dark" Fund
Chicago Community Foundation, Michael Fund: $75,000 Donor-Advised "Dark" Fund
Feed the Truth: $33,800 Organic food industry lobby
Bluebell Foundation: $20,000 Donor-Advised "Dark" Fund
RSF Social Finance: $15,050 Donor-Advised "Dark" Fund
Allison Wilson & Jonathan Latham: $15,000 Anti-biotech group - undeclared sources

2022
Centre for Effective Altruism: $200,000 Donor-Advised "Dark" Fund
Ryan Salame: $160,000 On behalf of Alameda clients
National Philanthropic Trust – Adadevoh Memorial Fund: $87,000 Donor-Advised "Dark" Fund
Organic Consumers Association: $54,430 Organic food industry lobby
Woodhouse Foundation: $50,000 Donor-Advised "Dark" Fund
San Diego Foundation: $50,000 Donor-Advised "Dark" Fund
Bluebell Foundation: $30,000 Donor-Advised "Dark" Fund
Westreich Foundation: $25,000 Donor-Advised "Dark" Fund
Allison Wilson & Jonathan Latham: $15,000 Anti-biotech group - undeclared sources
Community Foundation of Western North Carolina: $10,000 Donor-Advised "Dark" Fund
Laura and John Arnold Foundation: $5,000
Soleil Moscona: $5,000
Lilah Hilliard Fisher Foundation: $5,000

https://usrtk.org/donors
If we look at the trends over the last five years, the NGO’s fundraising shifted from mostly public to almost all dark, donor-advised funds. This reflects a general trend in foundation giving and the end of NGOs claiming to operate transparently. Some of their funding though is quite unusual or downright bizarre. For example:

- the largest funder this year, the Adadevoh Memorial Fund, is a Nigerian fund named after a heroic doctor who died from Ebola. Why would a Nigerian healthcare foundation be donating to a left-wing American political activist group?
- The Centre for Effective Altruism is a controversial donor-advised fund aimed at making young billionaires feel less bad about how they acquired their wealth. As the $200K donated to US Right to Know in 2022 was a one-off along with FTX’s Ryan Salame’s $160K, we can only assume that this is Sam Bankman-Fried cash via the Alameda hedge fund (see image below). SBF spoke glowingly about effective altruism and seemed OK to steal from his hedge fund clients to donate more. (As this is stolen money, if US Right to Know had any integrity, they should give it back to the cheated investors.)
- Allison Wilson and Jonathan Latham are anti-biotech campaigners who have never disclosed the sources of their funding.
- Three donor-advised funds: Chicago Community Foundation ($150K), San Diego Foundation ($50K) and Community Foundation of Western North Carolina ($10K) are all committed to alleviating poverty and addressing need in their local communities. UK Right to Know does not do this type of work so we can assume they flipped some donors already involved in their communities and decided to leave their donations dark.

So where did the organic food lobby and anti-vax money go in 2023? Given events, the money surely did not run out, but with all of their donor-advised funds, I’m afraid the rest of us have been left in the dark.

We do not have a right to know and now it’s none of your damn business.
US Right to Know takes cash from anti-vaxxers, organic food lobbyists, dark money groups

Crypto fraudster SBF was secretly buying influence and USRTK backed up.

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