

AMERICAN CONSERVATIVE UNION (ACU)

The American Conservative Union (ACU) is a 501(c)(4) founded in 1964, best known for hosting the annual Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC). ACU has been tightly aligned with Donald Trump and the far right since 2016. The most recently filed IRS 990 form shows that the organization received more than \$10.9 million in contributions and grants in 2023, a sharp decline from their peak fundraising of nearly \$20 million in 2020. ACU also has an affiliated 501(c)(3) foundation and a Political Action Committee.

Under the leadership of chairman Matt Schlapp, ACU has experienced high levels of staff and board turnover, with over half the staff and at least five board members resigning since 2021 amidst questions about Schlapp's leadership and financial stewardship of the organization. The ACU website does not currently have an "About" page or any information on staffing or board members.

Key findings include:

ACU Chair Matt Schlapp has faced allegations of sexual assault and financial improprieties. Matt Schlapp has served as chair of ACU since 2014 and is prominent as the public face of the organization. Schlapp reportedly receives annual compensation of \$600,000 annually, while his wife, former Trump White House aide Mercedes Schlapp, earns more than \$175,000 a year for "strategic communications" on behalf of the organization. During his tenure, Schlapp has closely aligned ACU with Donald Trump and the far right. In 2023, a former Herschel Walker campaign staffer accused Schlapp of sexually assaulting him. Schlapp vehemently denied the allegations and the staffer, Carlton Huffman, received a payment of nearly \$500,000 through an insurance policy to drop the suit in March 2024. Schlapp had previously been accused of sexual misconduct in 2017 and in 2022 but no action was taken against him by the ACU staff or board. In 2023, Bob Beauprez, the longtime treasurer of ACU resigned his position saying that he was not fully informed about money being paid for Schlapp's legal defense, and that he could not "deliver a financial report at the upcoming board meeting with any confidence in the accuracy of the numbers."

Over half of ACU's staff and at least five board members have resigned since 2021. More than half of the staff of ACU departed the organization between 2021 and 2023, including nearly all of the leadership team, with many citing concern over Schlapp's leadership. In the same timeframe, at least five members of the ACU board departed, including the longtime treasurer, Bob Beauprez, and Morton Blackwell, who had served on the board since the 1970s. Some former board members have called for Schlapp's resignation to protect the ACU's heritage and reputation. As of July 2024, the ACU's website contains no information about current staffing or board membership.

ACU hosts the annual Conservative Political Action Conference, a longtime hotbed of far-right extremism. ACU is best known for hosting the annual Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC). Although once a destination for every rising star in the Republican Party, attendance declined during the Trump era. Recent conferences have been increasingly dominated by the extreme far right, with Nazis openly attending the February 2024 conference and podcaster Jack Posobiec and Steve Bannon explicitly calling for the "overthrow" of democracy at a CPAC side event. Under Matt Schlapp's leadership CPAC has expanded abroad and sought partnerships with far right movements around the world.

Election denial is rampant at CPAC. Election deniers and conspiracy theorists have been given "top billing" at CPAC events since 2020. At least three groups that were behind the "March to Save

America” rally on January 6 before the attack on the Capitol sponsored CPAC in 2022. During the 2020 election campaign Matt Schlapp spread lies about voter fraud that were deemed “pants on fire” by non-partisan fact checking organizations, including rumors that 9,000 non-Nevadans voted in the state and that sharpie pens were tainting ballots in Arizona.

BACKGROUND & PHILOSOPHY

Organization Type: 501(c)(4)

Website: [CPAC.org](https://cpac.org)

Address: 1199 North Fairfax Street Suite 500, Alexandria, VA 22314

YouTube: [CPACplus](https://www.youtube.com/c/CPACplus) (46.7K subscribers as of July 2024)

Twitter: [@ACU Foundation](https://twitter.com/ACUFoundation) (1.2K followers as of July 2024)

Facebook: [TheACUF](https://www.facebook.com/TheACUF) (1K followers as of July 2024)

1964: The American Conservative Union was established. “The American Conservative Union, or ACU, founded in 1964, is an American lobbying organization that also serves as a form of representation for American political conservatives. Historians believe that conservatism as a political movement really gained a new foothold in the 1960s, and with that came the founding of many conservative organizations, including the ACU in 1964. It claims to be the United States' oldest conservative grassroots organization. The ACU's first founders created only a 50-person board of directors, but by 1972 the organization had grown to 45,000 members. As the ACU gained more funding, it worked to oppose different policies with huge campaigns. For example, they used a mass mailing campaign in 1977 to try to oppose the Panama Canal treaties, which cost them \$1.4 million. The organization also began hosting the annual Conservative Political Action Conference, or CPAC, in 1974.” [Brigham Young University, [accessed 7/14/24](#)]

- **ALEC was originally a project of the ACU.** “The right attended to state government through the American Legislative Exchange Council, which began as a project of the American Conservative Union and become an independent tax-exempt organization in 1975.” [Alan J. Lichtman, *White Protestant Nation: The Rise of the American Conservative Movement*, [2008](#)]

ACU is best known for hosting the annual CPAC conference. “The American Conservative Union is best known for hosting the annual Conservative Political Action Conference, a four-day convention that is ‘the preeminent national confab for politicians and activists of the right.’ Since 1974, the conference has served as a gathering ground and pulpit for party leaders, lawmakers, candidates, activists, and donors across the conservative political spectrum. As noted by The New York Times, ‘a speaking slot at CPAC is prime real estate for ambitious Republicans.’ CPAC kicks off with an ‘Activism Boot Camp,’ which CNN described as a venue for ‘teaching would-be candidates and campaign staffers how to win and booting liberals out of office.’ The next three days of CPAC consist of keynote speakers, panels, and discussions to ‘unite the political leaders of the conservative movement with the people who make up the movement.’ At the end of the conference, attendees respond to a straw poll that is effectively a ‘gauge of the Republican base’s mood.’” [Accountable.us, [accessed 7/15/24](#)]

ACU rates members of Congress and state legislators in an annual scorecard. “The ACU has released an annual scorecard ranking every member of Congress’ voting records based on conservative principles since 1971. They expanded the scorecard to include all state lawmakers in 2015. The ACU calls its scorecard project the “gold standard for elected officials.” [Accountable.us, [accessed 7/15/24](#)]

ACU has an affiliated 501(c)(3) organization, the CPAC Foundation. “Founded in 1964, the CPAC Foundation is the nation’s oldest conservative grassroots organization and seeks to preserve and protect the values of life, liberty, and property for every American.” [CPAC Foundation, [accessed 7/15/24](#)]

ACU has an affiliated Political Action Committee. The ACU Political Action Committee “a registered PAC that supports candidates for office who reflect the conservative principles on which the ACU was founded.” Although the PAC no longer has a website, it has reported raising over \$500,000 and spending more than \$2 million in the 2024 election cycle as of May 31. [ACU Political Action Committee, [archived](#); Open Secrets, [accessed 7/15/24](#)]

STAFF

Notable Staff And Directors (2023)		
Name	Position	2023 Total Compensation
Matt Schlapp	Chairman	\$350,000
David Safavian	General Counsel	\$181,583
Mercedes Schlapp	Strategic Communications	\$178,267
Lynne Rasmussen	SVP of Operations	\$157,575
Patrick Nolan	Director	\$117,150
Macy Cochran	Director of Development	\$103,018
Daniel Schneider	Former Executive Director	\$266,260
Ryan McGovan	Former Director of Finance	\$187,226
Laura Nasim	Former Director	\$147,418
James O'Connell	Former Director	\$141,722
Fred McGrath	Former Director	\$127,007
Alex Hinson	Former Deputy Director	\$113,365
Megan Powers	Former Director of Special Projects	\$104,424

Source: IRS 2023 990 Form, Filed on [2/17/24](#)

ACU's most recent 990, filed in February 2024, lists a large number of staff and board departures.

Matt Schlapp, Chairman

Matt Schlapp serves as “the face of CPAC” more so than previous chairs of the ACU. “More so than previous chairmen, Schlapp is the face of CPAC — along with his wife, Mercedes, who has decades of experience in English and Spanish-language media. In 2020, some of Schlapp’s corporate lobbying clients dumped him after he tweeted that Black Lives Matter protests were seeking ‘political gain’ in the wake of George Floyd’s death at the hands of police, according to lobbying records and media reports.” [Washington Post, [2/28/23](#)]

2023: Schlapp has faced criticism for pressuring critical board members to resign and aligning ACU too closely with Donald Trump. “Since Schlapp became chairman in 2014, board members who questioned his stewardship have quit or felt pressure to resign, said David A. Keene, who served as

chairman for more than two decades before Cardenas. ‘Dissent is not tolerated. ... If all of this had happened at some other point in the past, there would have already have been in an intervention,’ Keene said. “the board needs to be thinking about the importance of what they do to the movement as a whole.’ CPAC has long been a must-stop for Republican candidates eyeing higher office, and Schlapp helped build the conference into a global brand, with spinoff gatherings around the world. He also has been credited with putting the organization on more solid financial footing over the past decade. [...] But Schlapp has also faced criticism for moving the group away from its roots in the conservative movement and aligning it too closely with the donor class and far-right wing of former president Donald Trump’s political base. Some corporate sponsors have backed away, and ticket sales were slow at this year’s flagship gathering in Washington, D.C., which was scheduled shortly after the sexual misconduct claims became public.” [Washington Post, [11/15/23](#)]

2014: Schlapp was elected chair of ACU signaling that he wanted the organization to take a more inclusive approach. “Former Bush administration official Matt Schlapp was elected chairman of the American Conservative Union on Thursday, and he signaled that he wants the group to take a more inclusive approach, which could extend to gay Republicans. [...] In the past, CPAC has taken heat over perceptions that gay rights groups aren’t welcomed. Without offering too many specifics, Schlapp said in an interview that he wants the ACU to embrace a big-tent attitude. ‘The goal of ACU is not to kick all people out who might come from a different perspective,’ he said. ‘In its name, it’s a union, to bring people together in a coalition. That’s the goal. When it comes to CPAC, the welcome mat is out, recognizing the fact that not everyone agrees. At the same time, we want to be true to our principles.’ That approach, signaled Schlapp, will also apply to national security hawks, some of whom feel that CPAC tends to be dominated by libertarian activists.” [Politico, [6/19/14](#)]

2009: Schlapp left a job at Koch Industries after an internal review into an alleged anti-gay remark. “Schlapp has previously clashed with colleagues over allegations that he made offensive remarks, according to interviews with former colleagues. In one instance, Schlapp left a senior job at Koch Industries, the multibillion-dollar industrial conglomerate, after an internal review into an alleged anti-gay remark, according to three people familiar with the previously unreported incident.” [Washington Post, [2/28/23](#)]

Sexual Assault Allegations

January 2023: Schlapp was sued by a former Herschel Walker campaign staffer over allegations that Schlapp sexually assaulted him. “Matt Schlapp, a top Republican political operative, and his wife Mercedes Schlapp, a one-time Donald Trump aide, are being sued by a former Herschel Walker campaign staffer over allegations that he sexually assaulted him while on the campaign. A lawyer for Schlapp on Tuesday said his clients deny the accusations and are considering ‘counter-lawsuit options.’ The suit was filed in Virginia Circuit Court for the city of Alexandria. The former Walker staffer, who filed the lawsuit anonymously, is seeking \$9.4 million in damages from the Schlapps, saying not only did Matt Schlapp commit sexual battery, but he and his wife defamed him afterward. Reached for comment, Schlapp’s attorney Charlie Spies called the complaint ‘false,’ and said the ‘Schlapp family is suffering unbearable pain and stress’ as a result. Schlapp also tweeted the statement from Spies. ‘No family should ever go through this and the Schlapps and their legal team are assessing counter-lawsuit options,’ said Spies, who is representing the couple. The lawsuit follows claims earlier this month by the former Walker campaign staffer, who said Schlapp sexually assaulted him in Georgia in October while Schlapp was visiting the state to stump for the Republican Senate candidate.” [Politico, [1/17/23](#)]

February 2023: Schlapp was reportedly receiving annual compensation of \$600,000 a year.

“Schlapp has turned CPAC into a global brand, with events last year in two states and six countries. With his lobbying income declining after Trump left office, Schlapp received a \$150,000 payment in 2021 for “business services,” and he started receiving annual compensation of \$600,000 in mid-2022, according to tax documents and people familiar with the organization’s finances. The organization’s chairman is traditionally an unpaid volunteer. Schlapp’s wife, former Trump White House aide Mercedes Schlapp, is also on the payroll and received \$175,500 for “strategic communications” in 2021, tax records show.” [Washington Post, [2/28/23](#)]

November 2023: ACU’s costs to defend Schlapp from sexual misconduct allegations exceeded \$1 million.

“Schlapp was sued in January by a Senate campaign staffer who claimed that the longtime Republican power broker groped his crotch during a campaign trip to Atlanta last fall. Schlapp has acknowledged going to two bars that night with the staffer, Carlton Huffman, but has denied any wrongdoing and attacked his accuser’s credibility. The ACU’s payments for Schlapp’s legal fees in the case exceeded \$1 million as of August, as the discovery process was only beginning, according to the resignation letter from former vice chairman Charlie Gerow that recently was filed as part of the litigation in Alexandria Circuit Court. When board treasurer Bob Beauprez resigned in May, saying he could no longer vouch for the organization’s financial statements, he also sounded the alarm about Schlapp’s legal fees. ‘Any settlement of upwards of a couple of million dollars plus the accumulated legal expenses ... would break the organization, not to mention the reputational damage,’ he wrote.” [Washington Post, [11/15/23](#)]

December 2023: Additional sexual misconduct allegations against Schlapp emerged.

“Matt Schlapp, the influential chairman of the American Conservative Union, is facing additional allegations of sexual assault that apparently took place before the incident that launched a more than \$9 million sexual misconduct lawsuit against him last year. Carlton Huffman, a Republican staffer on Herschel Walker’s US senate campaign, initially accused Schlapp of sexually assaulting him last year. Huffman had been assigned to drive Schlapp to campaign events in the Atlanta area and alleged Schlapp fondled him without his consent during a car ride in October 2022. According to new reporting, based on court documents obtained by The Washington Post, Schlapp was also accused of sexual misconduct twice before – first in 2017 and then in early 2022. The updated court filing alleges the incidents were reported to staffers of the American Conservative Union, which hosts the annual Conservative Political Action Conference, but ‘no action was taken against Schlapp,’ according to The Post.” [CNN, [12/16/23](#)]

March 2024: The Republican operative who accused Schlapp of sexual assault received a significant financial settlement to drop the suit.

“The Republican operative who accused American Conservative Union chairman Matt Schlapp of sexual assault last year received a significant financial settlement in exchange for dropping his lawsuit against Schlapp, multiple sources familiar with the case told CNN. The \$480,000 settlement was paid to Carlton Huffman through an insurance policy, according to a source familiar with the details. Schlapp’s legal team did not respond for comment when asked about the financial settlement, but on Tuesday said that Huffman dropped the lawsuit and Schlapp claimed he had been exonerated. ‘From the beginning, I asserted my innocence,’ Schlapp said in a statement. ‘Our family was attacked, especially by a left-wing media that is focused on the destruction of conservatives regardless of the truth and the facts.’ Schlapp’s lawyers also released a statement by Huffman, the language of which was part of their private agreement. ‘The claims made in my lawsuits were the result of a complete misunderstanding, and I regret that the lawsuit caused pain to the Schlapp family,’ Huffman said, according to that statement. ‘Neither the Schlapps nor the ACU paid me anything to dismiss my claims against them.’ But multiple sources familiar with the allegations and legal proceedings told CNN that Huffman did, in fact, receive a financial settlement via an insurance

company. When reached for comment, Huffman told CNN, ‘I am only legally allowed to say five words, and that is ‘We have resolved our differences.’ Those are the only five words that I’m legally allowed to say.’” [CNN, [3/27/24](#)]

Mercedes Schlapp, Strategic Communication

Mercedes Schlapp was a senior communications staffer for Trump White House and campaign.

“Mercedes Schlapp, the White House director of strategic communications, announced on Monday that she would leave her West Wing post to join President Trump’s re-election campaign, the latest move in a shuffle of the White House press shop. Ms. Schlapp said in an interview that she had discussed her departure with Jared Kushner, Mr. Trump’s son-in-law and senior adviser, for weeks. It had been widely expected since Stephanie Grisham was appointed the new press secretary and communications director last week, according to multiple people familiar with the discussions. After some discussion of keeping Ms. Schlapp in the administration but moving her out of the White House and to an agency, those talks fell apart. ‘I am excited to announce that @MercedesSchlapp will soon be joining our Campaign,’ the president wrote on Twitter. ‘She feels so strongly about our Country & its future. We are setting records in so many ways, & we will keep it going. Mercedes has done a fantastic job within the Administration & I am so thankful!’” [New York Times, [7/1/19](#)]

2018: Matt and Mercedes Schlapp were described as “Washington’s Trump-era it couple.” “Today Mr. Schlapp and his wife, Mercedes Schlapp, the director of strategic communications at the White House, are the most visible in the city’s cadre of conservative Republicans who, faced with a populist Trump juggernaut, chose to scramble aboard. [...] To some Republicans the Schlapps are a conservative ‘it couple.’ To others they’re opportunists. Either way, they’re symbolic of a deep rift within their party. Business is in the meantime booming at Cove Strategies, the lobbying and public relations firm the Schlapps founded in 2009 (Ms. Schlapp stepped away from the business when she took her White House job). Their lobbying income alone has surged in the year since Mr. Trump took office, to more than \$1 million in 2017 from \$600,000 in 2015. Koch Industries — Mr. Schlapp is a former chief Washington lobbyist for the corporation — was Cove’s first client. He said there was even more income from Cove’s strategic communications work, which he declined to reveal. Ms. Schlapp has been a board member and paid strategic communications consultant for the National Rifle Association, a role she gave up the month she entered the White House. In 2015 she earned \$60,000 from the N.R.A. for an average of one hour of work per week, according to N.R.A. tax filings, and \$45,000 in 2016.” [New York Times, [4/30/18](#)]

Staff Turmoil and Departures

August 2022: ACU Executive Director Dan Schneider left to join the Media Research Center.

“After helping to lead the American Conservative Union for nearly nine years, Dan Schneider is joining the Media Research Center as vice president of its Free Speech America division. Schneider, familiar to many of ACU’s CPAC attendees, will focus on highlighting the woke movement in corporate America. ‘Dan will lead the fight to protect Americans’ First Amendment rights by exposing Big Tech censorship wherever it happens and documenting each case in MRC’s exclusive Censortrack.org database,’ said MRC founder Brent Bozell, who made the announcement today. ‘We are in the fight for our lives. The radical Left is using all their tools and all their power to destroy America by silencing the majority. We have no alternative but to fight back and win,’ said Schneider. He served in the George W. Bush administration, eventually becoming the acting assistant secretary at the Department of Health and Human Services. He is a lifetime member of the NRA and an Eagle Scout.” [Washington Examiner, [8/19/22](#)]

January 2023. A former ACU employee filed a complaint with the EEOC alleging that she was fired in retaliation for complaining about sexist and racist comments. “Schlapp’s leadership is also facing scrutiny from a former employee, who is a Black woman. Regina Bratton was a broadcast journalist who had worked on CPACs for a few years before she was hired by Schlapp in 2021 as communications and marketing director. In an interview with The Post, Bratton said a White male subordinate told her he didn’t like ‘working for or with women.’ He also said CPAC was ‘not an affirmative action employer,’ referring to Black and Hispanic CPAC freelancers, according to Bratton. Bratton, 51, said she informed the Schlapps about the remarks but was not aware of any disciplinary action against the younger employee, who worked for her on the Schlapps’ broadcast. In the complaint reviewed by The Post that she filed with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Bratton alleges she was discriminated against and was fired last year in retaliation for her complaints. Schlapp did not respond to questions about Bratton. ‘It wasn’t like you were working for a mission,’ Bratton said. She added, referring to the Schlapps, ‘It was like you were promoting a king and a queen. ... I did not feel valued because I was just a minion to do their bidding.’” [Washington Post, [2/28/23](#)]

February 2023: More than half the staff of ACU departed between 2021 and 2023. “With CPAC readying to welcome Trump back to its flagship annual gathering in D.C. this week, Schlapp is facing multiple challenges, including the exodus of more than half of its staff since 2021, according to the current and former employees and board members. Some expressed concern that Schlapp has given an inexperienced contractor too much influence. One former employee notified the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission last month of plans to sue over claims that she was fired in retaliation for complaining about a co-worker’s sexist and racist comments. ‘The culture was toxic,’ said the former communication director, Regina Bratton, in an interview. ‘From my perspective, he acted like a bully.’” [Washington Post, [2/28/23](#)]

March 2023: Laura Nasim departed ACU to join Citizens United. “Laura Nasim is now director of development at Citizens United. She previously was at the American Conservative Union, and is a Trump alum.” [Politico, [3/4/23](#)]

May 2023: Fred McGrath and Ryan McGowan left ACU to form a new conservative scorecard organization. “A new conservative group has formed with the purpose of analyzing the votes and policies of federal and state lawmakers and assigning them a grade “based on the limited government principles of the U.S. Constitution.” The group, the Institute for Legislative Analysis (ILA), describes its mission as “advancing the limited government principles of the U.S. Constitution by increasing transparency within Congress and the 50 state legislatures” and uses what it calls a ‘Limited Government Index’ to calculate whether an individual lawmaker leans toward a larger role for government or a more limited one. [...] Speaking with Fox News Digital, ILA President Fred McGrath and CEO Ryan McGowan said the new ratings index can provide crucial information to voters about their respective representatives in Congress and in state legislatures, and it would help them have all necessary information when deciding for whom to cast their vote.” [Fox News, [5/23/23](#)]

May 2023: ACU Treasurer Bob Beauprez resigned from the board. “A top leader in the organization that puts on CPAC, the highly influential conference of conservative leaders, resigned on Tuesday night, citing financial mysteries surrounding the organization’s leader. Bob Beauprez, the longtime treasurer of the American Conservative Union, said that he was not fully informed about money being paid for chairman Matt Schlapp’s legal defense against a lawsuit accusing him of sexual assault. ‘I cannot deliver a financial report at the upcoming board meeting with any confidence in the

accuracy of the numbers,’ Beauprez wrote in a letter to the ACU’s board of directors.” [New York Magazine, [5/25/23](#)]

May 2023: Deputy Director Alex Hinson left ACU to join the American Legislative Exchange Council. “Alex Hinson serves as ALEC’s Director of Corporate and Non-Profit Relations. He has extensive expertise in the non-profit space, as well as years of campaign and government experience. Previously, Alex has held the position of Director of Corporate Sponsorship at the American Conservative Union, as well as serving as the White House Liaison for the United States Treasury Department. Alex loves to golf, cook, and spend time with his family.” [American Legislative Exchange Council, [accessed 7/14/24](#)]

August 2023: ACU board member Timothy Ryan resigned. “Just last week another board member, Timothy Ryan, also resigned, according to a person with knowledge of the organization’s operations. Ryan’s resignation has not previously been reported.” [Politico, [8/25/23](#)]

August 2023: ACU vice chair Charlie Gerow resigned calling for an investigation of Matt Schlapp and the ACU’s financial practices. “The vice chair of the Conservative Political Action Coalition has resigned from his longtime position on the organization’s board and is calling for investigations into the group’s top leader and its financial practices, among other issues. Charlie Gerow, an attorney and communications executive who has served on the board of CPAC and its parent organization, the American Conservative Union, for nearly two decades, submitted his letter of resignation on Friday.” [Politico, [8/25/23](#)]

November 2023: At Least Five Board Members Departed ACU. “The parent organization of the Conservative Political Action Conference lost another high-profile board member this week amid mounting criticism of Chairman Matt Schlapp and ballooning legal fees from a sexual misconduct lawsuit against him. Morton Blackwell, who has served on the board of the American Conservative Union (ACU) since the 1970s, said he submitted his resignation Monday but declined to comment further. Blackwell is the founder and president of the Leadership Institute, which trains conservative activists, and also serves as one of Virginia’s members on the Republican National Committee. He has previously expressed concerns about the sexual misconduct claim against Schlapp. Blackwell is the fifth board member to depart in recent months, following an exodus of more than half of the staff since 2021. Some former board members are calling for Schlapp’s resignation to protect the reputation of one of the oldest and most prominent institutions in the conservative movement.” [Washington Post, [11/15/23](#)]

FINANCIALS

IRS 990 Financial Reporting										
Description	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014
Total Revenue	\$10,922,984	\$15,442,633	\$8,116,706	\$19,887,494	\$16,702,315	\$3,359,168	\$9,256,639	\$8,067,626	\$9,130,446	\$6,423,057
Total Expenses	\$10,976,991	\$14,320,322	\$8,501,833	\$18,640,526	\$31,798,084	\$2,368,393	\$9,640,633	\$6,955,602	\$9,075,427	\$6,055,518
Net Assets	\$3,806,672	\$3,853,819	\$2,708,812	\$3,060,698	\$1,782,817	\$979,544	-\$19,647	\$377,353	-\$734,671	\$530,224

Source: [American Conservative Union IRS 990 Forms](#)

ACU is funded by major right wing foundations, including DonorsTrust, The 85 Fund, and the Mercer and Bradley Foundations. “According to data compiled by DeSmog and the Conservative Transparency Project, frequent donors to the American Conservative Union include the American Action Network, the Mercer Family Foundation, the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, DonorsTrust, the National Rifle Association Foundation, and the National Christian Charitable Foundation. In 2021, the American Conservative Union Foundation received \$145,000 from the 85 Fund, a 501(c)(3) organization that operates within Leonard Leo’s network of conservative nonprofits

aiming to influence the federal judiciary and the American political system more broadly.”
[Accountable.us, [accessed 7/15/24](#)]

2023: Matt Schlapp’s consulting income boomed during his tenure as ACU chair. “When Schlapp became chairman of the ACU in 2014, tax returns show the organization was struggling financially. ACU was founded by conservative luminaries such as William F. Buckley Jr. to grow the movement after Barry Goldwater’s resounding defeat in the 1964 election. Schlapp stabilized the storied institution with the help of a \$750,000 loan from energy executive John Eddy, whom he recruited to the board, according to Wade Murphy, Eddy’s business partner at the time and a fellow alumnus of the Bush administration. Schlapp’s consulting practice boomed during the Trump administration and his wife worked in the White House. The couple bought a \$3.1 million home in 2018 on a tony street in Alexandria called Mansion Drive, property records show. They also own a 31-acre homestead, named Victory Farm, near the Blue Ridge Mountains.” [Washington Post, [2/28/23](#)]

2021: Federal authorities were reportedly investigating campaign finance improprieties at ACU. “The American Conservative Union, the political organization helmed since 2015 by lobbyist Matt Schlapp, is best known for its Conservative Political Action Conference and its annual scorecard of the voting records of politicians in D.C. and across the country. But the ACU has recently found itself facing unwelcome scrutiny over a smaller aspect of its work: making the occasional endorsement in congressional races. Sources tell The Dispatch that federal investigators are currently looking into possible criminal campaign-finance misdeeds at ACU during Schlapp’s tenure. As part of the investigation, the FBI has interviewed former and current ACU employees about the financial dealings of the organization and its leaders—and in particular, as one source said, about their “knowledge of the events leading up to the endorsement of Brian Kelsey.” Who is Brian Kelsey? He’s a Tennessee state senator who in 2016 was trying to secure the Republican nomination for the open seat in his state’s 8th Congressional District. Beginning in July 2016, Kelsey made a series of odd financial moves. As reported by the Tennessean, his state Senate campaign sent more than \$100,000 to a political action committee, the Standard Club PAC, affiliated with a Nashville members-only club. That PAC then sent \$37,000 to a federal PAC called Citizens 4 Ethics in Government, which then turned around and sent \$36,000 to the ACU. The Standard Club PAC also sent \$30,000 to the ACU directly. Immediately thereafter, the ACU, which had endorsed Kelsey in the federal race shortly before, inked an \$80,000 radio ad buy trumpeting him as the race’s true conservative champion. ‘It is often difficult to cut through confusing campaign rhetoric to figure out which candidate is the best conservative in a race, but we think this is actually an easy call,’ Schlapp said in a statement at the time. ‘If voters in western Tennessee are looking for a proven leader with a conservative track record, the decision is easy. Brian Kelsey is the real deal.’” [The Dispatch, [10/6/21](#)]

2021: ACU paid millions to firms owned by its board members. “The American Conservative Union touts itself as ‘the nation’s original conservative organization’ and loves to rail against ‘reckless spending’—but it’s hardly cautious about turning over supporters’ cash to its own top executives. The ACU, best known as the group behind the annual Conservative Political Action Conference, or CPAC, has enriched companies belonging to two of its directors to the tune of \$4 million in the past five years, according to a review by The Daily Beast of their yearly tax forms and other required filings. This cash has poured out of the ACU’s own coffers, out of its political committees, and straight from the pockets of the right-wing rank and file into firms controlled by Vice Chairman Charlie Gerow—now a candidate for governor of Pennsylvania—and Kimberly Bellissimo, secretary of the ACU’s foundation. The ACU insisted to The Daily Beast that it selected the vendors purely on merit, and complied with all relevant rules and regulations. ‘We take our fiduciary responsibilities seriously and work to ensure all compliance is adhered to, operating above board with the full backing of the board of directors,’

spokeswoman Regina Bratton wrote in an email. ‘ACU requires all such contracts to be disclosed to our Board and all disclosures to be made as required by law.’ But the legal experts and ethics advocates The Daily Beast consulted for this story questioned whether the ACU had really conducted a thorough search to identify the most capable and cost-effective contractors to accomplish the organization’s aims—and expressed bafflement at apparently missing and misplaced information on the organization’s disclosures to the Internal Revenue Service.” [Daily Beast, [10/18/21](#)]

CPAC

2024: CPAC attendance and relevance was in decline. “CPAC has long been as much a social event as an opportunity to set the tone and agenda of the conservative movement. But in recent years, as Donald J. Trump has remade the Republican Party, CPAC’s attendance and cultural capital has declined, a trend heightened by allegations of sexual assault made in a lawsuit against the organization’s president, Matt Schlapp. (Mr. Schlapp has denied the allegations.) In the days leading up to the convention, one longtime conservative activist told The New York Times in a text message that he would rather poke out his own eyes than attend, arguing that the event had turned into a veritable Trump rally at which no other views were permitted. Those who did show up were quick to note that the CPAC party scene was also on life support.” [New York Times, [2/26/24](#)]

- **2023: CPAC saw lagging ticket sales as key Republicans skipped the conference.** “The current turmoil comes as CPAC grapples with corporate backlash over its embrace of the far right and concerns about a potentially lackluster turnout this year as Trump’s political future appears uncertain. The Fox Nation streaming service is not returning as a sponsor, and Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, an ascendant figure in the Republican Party and Trump’s emerging rival in the 2024 campaign, is skipping it. [...] As CPAC’s flagship event in the Washington area kicks off Wednesday, ticket sales are lagging from past years, prompting price cuts, giveaways and a special rate offered to congressional staff, according to people familiar with the event’s inner workings who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss confidential information. Many high rollers who have in the past bought the conference’s biggest premium packages have not registered this time.” [Washington Post, [2/28/23](#)]

2023: MAGA extremists dominated CPAC turning the conference into “more like a sideshow than a featured act.” “For decades, the Conservative Political Action Conference occupied a center ring in Republican politics. In 1974, Ronald Reagan used the inaugural event to unveil his brand of optimistic conservatism, describing a ‘city on the hill’ to the conservative activists. In 2010, libertarian supporters of Ron Paul lifted their candidate to victory at the event’s presidential straw poll, an early harbinger of the Tea Party upheaval that would soon shake the party. And in 2011, a Manhattan businessman walked onto the stage to the tune of ‘For the Love of Money,’ declared himself an opponent of abortion and began a yearslong takeover of the Republican Party. That businessman, Donald J. Trump, will be back at the four-day conservative gathering known as CPAC this week near Washington. He’ll be joined by a long list of right-wing media provocateurs, culture-war activists and a smattering of senators. Missing from the agenda: many of the Republicans seen as the future of the party. When Mr. Trump became leader of the Republican Party, he remade the conference in his political image. Now, as the party’s voters, donors and officials consider a future that may not include Mr. Trump as their leader, some Republicans say the decades-old CPAC gathering has increasingly become more like a sideshow than a featured act, one that seems made almost exclusively for conservative media.” [New York Times, [2/28/23](#)]

- **CPAC has repositioned itself as a “MAGA organ.”** “If Republican Sens. Mike Lee of Utah, Ron Johnson of Wisconsin, Tim Scott of South Carolina and Marco Rubio of Florida aren’t fully MAGA in their hearts, you wouldn’t know it from their current public personas. Other Republicans, including former Sens. Rob Portman of Ohio, Jeff Flake of Arizona, and Bob Corker of Tennessee, along with former Reps. Paul Ryan of Wisconsin, Eric Cantor of Virginia, and Liz Cheney of Wyoming, were either shown the door or fled for it themselves. And outside institutions such as the Conservative Political Action Committee, or CPAC, and the Heritage Foundation have repositioned themselves as MAGA organs.” [The Fulcrum, [4/2/24](#)]

2018: CPAC completed a “a hard lurch toward something more akin to a carnival of conspiracy theorists, white nationalists and mainstream Republicans all uniting under President Trump.” “For years the Conservative Political Action Conference has had an extremist problem — budding white nationalists, young and excited leaders of the racist “alt-right” and angry voices in the anti-LGBT movement all cozying up with conservative political leaders and hoping to have their voices heard. But just one year after President Trump rode a wave of populist nationalism into the White House, event organizers seem to have accepted a hard lurch toward something more akin to a carnival of conspiracy theorists, white nationalists and mainstream Republicans all uniting under President Trump. From the National Rifle Association’s Wayne LaPierre claiming that the Democratic party is “infested with saboteurs who don’t believe in capitalism, don’t believe in the Constitution, don’t believe in our freedom and don’t believe in America as we know it,” to former advisor to the president Sebastian Gorka declaring that the election of President Trump is proof God exists, the annual conservative confab was anything but tame. Even Trump, whose administration has normalized ideologies on the far right, basked in the response from the crowd who had come to hear him speak, often punctuating their applause with chants including ‘U-S-A’ and ‘Lock her up!’ a common campaign refrain targeting Hillary Clinton. In many ways, CPAC has become an annual measure of how far the radical right has moved into the mainstream of the conservative right, especially in recent years as anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant and anti-LGBT groups have found political friends in the United States and Europe.” [Southern Poverty Law Center, [2/26/18](#)]

CPAC has expanded abroad in recent years. “The conference has recently expanded abroad and given platforms to authoritarian leaders praised by Trump. When CPAC was held in Budapest in May, the local host received 1 million euros from an entity funded by the repressive Hungarian government headed by Viktor Orban, according to Atlatszo, a Hungarian investigative journalism nonprofit. CPAC Brazil in June featured Eduardo Bolsonaro, a lawmaker and son of the then-president who, like Trump, fanned fears that voter fraud would thwart his reelection. Schlapp has defended establishing ties with right-wing movements around the world.” [Washington Post, [2/28/23](#)]

CPAC was “a small affair for its first 25 years or so of existence” but emerged as a “major phenomenon” for Republicans during the George W. Bush era. “CPAC was a small affair for its first 25 years or so of existence. And by the late 1990s, the parties were thoroughly sorted along ideological grounds. Moderates existed in both parties, but all the conservatives were Republicans, and there was no real doubt that the Republican Party was the political vehicle of the conservative movement and vice versa. New institutions that spoke more directly to the needs of the present day naturally came to overshadow older ones from a much earlier era. And by the 21st century, the ACU was no longer a particularly vibrant or important operation, a fact that in many ways speaks to its fundamental success. George W. Bush is not and will never be a conservative icon in quite the way Ronald Reagan was, but his administration marked the Washington ascendancy of a thoroughly conservative Republican Party in a way Reagan’s never did. But while ACU itself fell somewhat into the shadows, CPAC saw a surge of

attendance coincident with Bush's inauguration that set the stage for its emergence as a major phenomenon." [Vox, [2/22/17](#)]

Extremists at CPAC

2024: Nazis appeared to be openly attending CPAC. "Nazis appeared to find a friendly reception at the Conservative Political Action Conference this year. Throughout the conference, racist extremists, some of whom had secured official CPAC badges, openly mingled with conference attendees and espoused antisemitic conspiracy theories. The presence of these individuals has been a persistent issue at CPAC. In previous years, conference organizers have ejected well-known Nazis and white supremacists such as Nick Fuentes. But this year, racist conspiracy theorists didn't meet any perceptible resistance at the conference where Donald Trump has been the keynote speaker since 2017. At the Young Republican mixer Friday evening, a group of Nazis who openly identified as national socialists mingled with mainstream conservative personalities, including some from Turning Point USA, and discussed 'race science' and antisemitic conspiracy theories." [NBC, [2/24/24](#)]

2024: Steve Bannon was "ascendent" at a diminished CPAC. "In CPAC's post-Covid, post-January 6 diminishment, one figure is notably ascendant: Stephen K. Bannon, Trump's former chief White House strategist. It has long been Bannon's dream to smash up the European Union and most international institutions, dating back at least to his involvement, via the now-defunct data-mining firm Cambridge Analytica, in the Brexit campaign that led to the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the EU. A tagline in illuminated red lettering above this year's CPAC main stage read: 'Where globalism goes to die'". [The New Republic, [2/27/24](#)]

2024: Podcaster Jack Posobiec and Steve Bannon called for the overthrow of democracy at a CPAC side event. "Democracy did not have a good week at CPAC. It wasn't just Szanthe. On Thursday, video emerged of podcaster Jack Posobiec with Steve Bannon at a side event, announcing the end of democracy, adding, 'We're here to overthrow it completely. We didn't get all the way there on January 6, but we will endeavor to get rid of it and replace it with this right here.' Posobiec fishes something small out of his pocket, perhaps a religious medal, and holds it up. 'Because all glory is not to the government; all glory is to God.' Bannon chimes in with, 'Amen.'" [The New Republic, [2/27/24](#)]

ELECTION DENIAL & VOTING RIGHTS

2024: Election deniers and anti-democratic extremists dominated the speaking lineup at CPAC. "Anti-democratic extremism is alive and well at CPAC. Over the next few days, a cast of election deniers and insurrectionists will take the stage — peddling debunked conspiracies to an audience of extremist conservatives including leaders in the House MAGA majority. One such election denier set to speak today is Jeffrey Clark of the right-wing Center for Renewing America. The group made waves this week when its new plan revealing its priorities in a second Trump term included 'invoking the Insurrection Act on Day One' against protestors, underscoring how the far-right fringe of the GOP is taking extremism to a new level. Other familiar 'Big Lie' peddlers set to speak include: Former president Donald Trump, who has led the election denial movement, relentlessly peddling the 'Big Lie.' Sebastian Gorka, the host of the show "America First," who was banned from YouTube after he violated the platform's policies by repeatedly promoting debunked election fraud claims about the 2020 presidential election Steve Bannon, who as host of the 'War Room' podcast has earned a spot as 'one of the loudest' election deniers. And a host of leading Congressional election deniers, including: Elise Stefanik (R-NY), chair of the House Republican Conference, Jim Jordan (R-OH), Matt Gaetz (R-FL), Byron Donalds (R-FL), Tommy Tuberville (R-AL), Mark Green (R-TN), Scott Perry (R-PA), Russ

Fulcher (R-ID), Dan Bishop (R-NC), Cory Mills (R-FL), J.D. Vance (R-OH) and Kat Cammack (R-FL).” [Accountable.us, [2/23/24](#)]

2023: Election deniers “still given top billing” at CPAC. “In the exhibit hall, vendors displayed various styles of hats declaring “Trump won” and attendees referred to former president Donald Trump as the rightful winner of the 2020 election. But on the event stage, most prominent Republican lawmakers at the annual Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) didn’t bring up Trump’s big lie. Instead they largely chose not to repeat his common talking point that rampant voter fraud cost him his re-election. CPAC this year was seen as a crucial barometer of the likely contours of the 2024 fight. In that regard the majority of conservatives here aligned themselves closely with the former president. But they also chose not to relitigate the 2020 election and looked ahead to the 2024 contest, repeatedly calling Trump the former and future president. [...] While most speakers focused on issues other than election integrity, prominent election deniers were still given top billing. Kari Lake, a former TV news anchor who unsuccessfully ran for Arizona governor in 2022 and who continues to challenge both the results of her own election and the 2020 presidential election, was the keynote speaker at Friday night’s Ronald Reagan dinner. Though Lake didn’t bring up claims that Trump’s election was stolen, she dedicated many minutes to describing how her own election last November was rigged.” [The Guardian, [3/6/23](#)]

2022: January 6 organizers sponsored CPAC. “The three groups behind the “March to Save America” rally on Jan. 6 before the Capitol attack now sponsoring CPAC are Moms for America, Turning Point and Tea Party Patriots. This is the first year Moms for America, one of the 11 groups partnering on the “March to Save America” rally, has sponsored CPAC. Moms for America is listed as a presenting sponsor, a sponsorship level second only to the top sponsor slot held by Fox Nation. [...] Tea Party Patriots Action, another group that helped organize the Jan. 6 rally, is a \$35,000 supporting sponsor of this year’s CPAC. Tea Party Patriots Action was not listed as a sponsor of last year’s CPAC, which was held weeks after the Capitol attack. But a panel on ‘protecting elections’ featured Tea Party Patriots co-founder Jenny Beth Martin. This year, Tea Party Patriots returned as a sponsor and its cofounder gave a talk titled ‘Patriots Unite.’ [...] Turning Point, a nonprofit conservative student group that flourished under the Trump administration, is a \$15,000 contributing sponsor of this year’s CPAC after being a \$20,000 supporting sponsor last year. Turning Point’s 501(c)(4) nonprofit arm, Turning Point Action, is one of the 11 core groups that helped organize the Jan. 6 protests.” [Open Secrets, [2/25/22](#)]

- **Election denial groups and Mike Lindell sponsored 2022’s CPAC.** Groups at the helm of efforts pushing unfounded and disproven claims of voter fraud around the 2020 election are all listed as sponsors of this year’s CPAC, including the Public Interest Legal Foundation, the Heritage Foundation and Judicial Watch. The three nonprofits share a small circle of wealthy conservative donors with a revolving door of staff and consultants, according to an investigation by the Guardian using OpenSecrets data. Another sponsor of this year’s CPAC is Lindell-TV, MyPillow CEO Mike Lindell’s online TV show. A group called Voter Safe House is also listed among CPAC’s sponsors.” [Open Secrets, [2/25/22](#)]

2020: ACU Chairman Matt Schlapp Spread “Pants On Fire” Lies About The 2020 Election. “As supporters of President Donald Trump ramp up their efforts to delegitimize the election with unsubstantiated allegations of widespread voter fraud, one high-profile Republican ally claimed that 9,000 Nevada ballots were fraudulently cast by nonresidents. ‘We have literally 9,000 people who voted in this election who don’t live in Nevada,’ American Conservative Union chair Matt Schlapp told Fox News on Nov. 8, wrongly claiming the election has seen widespread ‘fraud’ and ‘illegality’ but offering

no proof to support his allegations. Schlapp also cited the 9,000 figure during a press conference the same day, telling a crowd of Trump supporters that many ‘non-Nevadans’ had been caught illegally voting in the state. [...] Schlapp claimed that as an example of voter fraud, ‘we have literally 9,000 people who voted in this election (in Nevada) who don’t live in Nevada.’ Schlapp has acknowledged that his 9,000 figure is not a literal count of illegal out-of-state voters. It is a speculative estimate he came up with based on a list of 3,062 individuals produced by the Trump campaign — a list that had its own problems. The original list included military personnel in its count and did not establish that any of the people it identified were actually ineligible to vote in Nevada. The burden of proof is on the speaker, and Schlapp has provided no credible evidence to substantiate his claim. We rate this statement Pants on Fire!” [PolitiFact, [11/11/20](#)]

- **Schlapp spread false rumors that felt tip pens were interfering with ballots in Arizona.** “Dubbed ‘Sharpiegate’ by conservatives on social media, the allegations could be used to try to undermine election results in the historically Republican state of Arizona, which the Associated Press called for Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden with 51% of the vote. [...] Facebook has also blocked the hashtag ‘#sharpiegate,’ Facebook spokeswoman Andrea Vallone said, while a Twitter spokeswoman said the social media company was labeling tweets that “misleadingly claim ballots were invalidated.” American Conservative Union Chairman Matt Schlapp has also repeated the fraud claims on Twitter and urged voters to report them to the Arizona attorney general’s office.” [Reuters, [11/4/20](#)]

2000: Matt Schlapp was a participant in the “Brooks Brothers Riot” to stop the Florida recount of Bush vs. Gore. “As we begin the second Bush administration, let’s take a moment to reflect upon one of the most historic episodes of the 2000 battle for the White House -- the now-legendary ‘Brooks Brothers Riot’ at the Miami-Dade County polling headquarters. This was when dozens of ‘local protesters,’ actually mostly Republican House aides from Washington, chanted ‘Stop the fraud!’ and ‘Let us in!’ when the local election board tried to move the re-counting from an open conference room to a smaller space. With help from their GOP colleagues and others, we identified some of these Republican heroes of yore in a photo of the event. Some of those pictured have gone on to other things, including stints at the White House. For example, Matt Schlapp, No. 6, a former House aide and then a Bush campaign aide, has risen to be White House political director.” [Washington Post, [1/24/05](#)]