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Groups Opposing Affordable COVID-19 Vaccines Took in Millions from Industry

COVID-19 has killed 100,000 Americans. A potential vaccine could help curb this pandemic—but only if it is affordable and available for all. On April 15, Congressional Progressive Leaders announced a set of key principles to ensure COVID-19 medicine access: no exclusivity, stop profiteering and full transparency.¹

The principles address a pressing concern. 58 million Americans reported not being able to pay for their medicines at least one time in the past year.² Nearly 80 percent of Americans believe the federal government should make a future coronavirus vaccine affordable.³

Despite this popular support, 33 signatories from 31 organizations recently wrote Congress to oppose the principles on COVID-19 drug pricing.⁴ The signatories said the principles were “dangerous” and “unacceptable.” They urged Congress to “Send [the proposals] back to the pit full of bad ideas.”

Public Citizen analyzed industry contributions to the organizations these signatories represent (Table 1).⁵ We found that:

- Of the 31 organizations listed, **at least 15 had received funding from the pharmaceutical industry** between 2015 and 2019.⁶
- During this period, these groups collectively **received \$2.5 million from industry.**

The contributions were drawn from public disclosures by the ten largest pharmaceutical corporations, and two industry trade associations, the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA) and the Biotechnology Innovation Organization (BIO).⁷ The scope and availability of the disclosures varied. The total number of organizations receiving industry contributions may be higher. Our full findings appear on the page below.

Industry funding often makes groups more sympathetic to industry priorities. This can present a misleading picture of the opposition to popular policies. Given that the overwhelming majority of Americans support measures to make COVID-19 medicines affordable, the choice for Congress should be clear.⁸

¹ U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-Illinois), Peter DeFazio (D-Oregon), Rosa DeLauro (D-Connecticut), and Lloyd Doggett (D-Texas). <https://schakowsky.house.gov/media/press-releases/congressional-progressive-leaders-announce-principles-covid-19-drug-pricing>

² <https://news.gallup.com/poll/268094/millions-lost-someone-couldn-afford-treatment.aspx>

³ <https://today.yougov.com/topics/health/survey-results/daily/2020/03/02/3ab95/3>

⁴ The letter is available here: <https://tinyurl.com/y7es4gcf>

⁵ The letter states that organizational names appear for purposes of identifying individual signatories. However, the letter also includes many organizational logos on the letterhead.

⁶ We included contributions to affiliated entities. See Table 1.

⁷ We analyzed the disclosures of Johnson & Johnson, Roche, Pfizer, Novartis, Merck & Co., GlaxoSmithKline, Sanofi, AbbVie, Takeda and Bayer. <https://tinyurl.com/y86mw7rq>.

⁸ <https://today.yougov.com/topics/health/survey-results/daily/2020/03/02/3ab95/3>

Table 1: Organizations that received contributions from the pharmaceutical industry.

Organization Name	Total Contribution (FY 2015 to 2019)
American Conservative Union	\$150,000
American Legislative Exchange Council Action*	\$532,150
Americans for a Balanced Budget	\$375,212
Americans for Tax Reform*	\$70,000
Center for Individual Freedom	\$25,000
Consumer Action for a Strong Economy	\$195,000
Council for Citizens Against Government Waste*	\$175,000
Eagle Forum Education & Legal Defense Fund*	\$90,000
Hudson Institute	\$300,000
Independent Women's Forum	\$60,000
Independent Women's Voice	\$40,000
Institute for Policy Innovation	\$374,500
Small Business & Entrepreneurship Council	\$35,000
Taxpayers Protection Alliance	\$75,000
Trade Alliance to Promote Prosperity	\$33,500
Total	\$2,530,362

Methodology: We drew from public disclosures made by the ten largest pharmaceutical corporations, and the tax filings of PhRMA and BIO.⁹ The scope and availability of the disclosures varied.¹⁰ A number of pharmaceutical contributions were given to affiliated entities. These cases are denoted with an asterisk in Table 1 and include:

- *Americans for Tax Reform. PhRMA contributed to the Americans for Tax Reform Foundation, the 501(c)(3) research arm of ATR;*
- *American Legislative Exchange Council Action. PhRMA contributed to the American Legislative Exchange Council, its parent organization;*
- *Council for Citizens Against Government Waste. PhRMA contributed to Citizens Against Government Waste, its parent organization; and*
- *Eagle Forum Education & Legal Defense Fund. PhRMA contributed to Eagle Forum, its parent organization.*

⁹ We analyzed the disclosures of Johnson & Johnson, Roche, Pfizer, Novartis, Merck & Co., GlaxoSmithKline, Sanofi, AbbVie, Takeda and Bayer on their websites and data provided to the Senate Finance Committee. <https://tinyurl.com/y2ker9bu>. PhRMA and BIO 990s were drawn from ProPublica. <https://projects.propublica.org/nonprofits/>

¹⁰ For example, many pharmaceutical corporations did not provide comprehensive disclosures. The trade association 990s also were not available for 2019.