

Dark Money Campaign Finance Report on Protect MI Constitution from Special Interests

Introduction written September 25, 2026

AI report generated August 9, 2026

Introduction

Google's Gemini AI generated this report and analyzed Michigan's dark money contributors to Protect MI Constitution from Special Interests, the coalition opposing Michigan's Proposal 1, the Nov. 2026 referendum asking whether voters want to call a constitutional convention. The report was generated on August 9, 2026. Gemini did not mark the text in red. The **red** text highlights details I found interesting.

The table on pages 8 and 9 summarizes the findings. You can analyze the types of positions a dark money fund has taken. But dark money funds can hide their donors, so this type of analysis remains of little value.

Note the interlinking of two of the three major dark money funders for the "no" side: the Fairness Project and the Global Impact Fund. Note also the interlinking of major contributors to convention call referendum dark money funds in other states (such as the Sixteen Thirty Fund) and the dark money contributors in Michigan.

No contributions have been reported to a "yes" side, so I cannot include them in this analysis. Michigan news media have not reported a systematic "yes" side campaign.

Campaign Finance Data Source

I have compiled the [contributions and expenditures data](#) for Protect MI Constitution from Special Interests from the campaign finance data maintained by Michigan's Secretary of State. The data are current as of July 20, 2026. No additional campaign finance filings are required until October 25, 2026, even though substantial contributions are likely to have been made between those two dates.

Prompt to Gemini's Deep Research

Who supports the following dark money groups that have contributed to Protect MI Constitution from Special Interests: 1) The Fairness Project, 2) American Opportunity Action, and 3) Global Impact Social Welfare Fund? Please cite all sources and, if possible, provide links to them. Why do you think they are opposing Michigan's 2026 state constitutional convention referendum by funding the coalition opposing a "yes" vote?

Gemini's Answer

Institutional Networks and Strategic Imperatives Behind the Opposition to Michigan's 2026 Constitutional Convention Referendum

Executive Overview

Article XII, Section 3 of the 1963 Michigan Constitution mandates that an automatic referral question appear on the statewide general election ballot every 16 years, asking voters whether to convene a state constitutional convention. On November 3, 2026, Michigan voters will face Proposal 1 (also designated Proposal 2026-01), which asks if elected delegates should assemble in 2027 to draft a general revision or targeted amendments to the state's foundational document.

A constitutional convention represents an independent exercise of constituent power, permitting citizens to bypass the state legislature to alter governmental structures. However, this automatic referral has drawn opposition from an array of state political leaders, public sector and industrial labor unions, business associations, and out-of-state advocacy networks. The primary ballot question committee organized to defeat the referendum is Protect MI Constitution from Special Interests.

While Protect MI Constitution presents itself as a nonpartisan, grassroots coalition defending citizens against undisclosed interests, official campaign finance filings with the Michigan Secretary of State reveal that virtually all of its initial funding originated from out-of-state tax-exempt 501(c)(4) entities. Foremost among these funding sources is American Opportunity Action, a Washington, D.C.-based organization that provided \$300,000 in seed capital—representing nearly 100% of the ballot committee's initial receipts—and helped drive total opposition spending past \$862,000 by mid-2026.

American Opportunity Action operates within an interconnected ecosystem of national 501(c)(4) advocacy groups, including The Fairness Project and the Global Impact Social

Welfare Fund. These organizations specialize in financing state-level ballot measure campaigns across the United States.

This report provides a detailed analysis of the financial supporters, institutional pipelines, and operational leadership behind these three dark money groups. It further evaluates the strategic and policy motives driving their decision to fund the opposition campaign against Michigan's 2026 constitutional convention referendum.

Profiles and Funding Architecture of the Dark Money Entities

The Fairness Project

The Fairness Project is a Washington, D.C.-based 501(c)(4) social welfare organization established to finance, organize, and execute state ballot initiative campaigns across the United States. Rather than focusing primarily on federal candidate races, the group directs tens of millions of dollars into state-level referendums concerning minimum wage increases, Medicaid expansion, paid family leave, and reproductive rights. For instance, in early 2026, the organization contributed \$11 million across four separate payments to the Virginians for Fair Elections referendum committee to support a statewide redistricting campaign.

Because The Fairness Project is registered under Section 501(c)(4) of the Internal Revenue Code, it is not required by federal law to publicly disclose the identities of its individual donors on IRS Form 990 filings. However, public tax records, grant disclosures, and investigative reporting from outlets such as ProPublica and InfluenceWatch reveal that its funding is derived from major national labor unions, mega-donor foundations, and dark money pass-through clearinghouses.

In 2025, the Global Impact Social Welfare Fund issued a \$5,100,000 grant for program support directly to The Fairness Project, making it one of the group's largest single institutional grantors. Furthermore, the Sixteen Thirty Fund—a prominent pass-through clearinghouse managed by the Washington-based philanthropic consulting firm **Arabella Advisors**—disclosed Schedule I grants to The Fairness Project totaling \$600,000 in 2018, \$625,000 in 2020, and \$226,000 in 2021.

The organization was launched with significant backing from major national labor unions, including the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW), and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). The entity also receives indirect financial flows from high-net-worth individual donors who fund its parent pass-through networks. These funders include the Berger Action Fund (funded by Swiss billionaire Hansjörg Wyss), the Open Society Policy Center (funded by George Soros), Democracy Fund Voice (funded by eBay founder Pierre Omidyar), and Chan Zuckerberg Initiative Advocacy. The group's pass-through funding mechanisms have drawn state-level regulatory scrutiny, including an investigation by Nebraska Attorney General Mike Hilgers alleging that grants passed through Sixteen

Thirty Fund, Hopewell Fund, and The Fairness Project bypassed state ballot funding regulations.

American Opportunity Action

American Opportunity Action is a 501(c)(4) advocacy organization incorporated in the District of Columbia. The organization received its tax-exempt status from the IRS in September 2025 and utilizes a commercial UPS Store address in Washington, D.C.. Reporting by Bridge Michigan and investigative coverage by The New York Times indicate that American Opportunity Action was established by a trio of experienced Democratic political operatives.

Its official filings list Preston Elliott as its principal officer. Elliott is a veteran political strategist who serves as campaign manager for New York Governor Kathy Hochul's 2026 reelection campaign, having previously served as director of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee (DSCC) Independent Expenditure fund, campaign manager for Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer's 2022 campaign, and campaign manager for former Montana Senator Jon Tester's 2012 campaign. The organization's public communications are directed by strategist Christina Reynolds.

As a 501(c)(4) non-profit, American Opportunity Action is not legally obligated to reveal its underlying contributors, drawing its capital from high-net-worth donors and progressive political networks. During the 2026 election cycle, the group emerged as a major financial engine, committing approximately \$6 million to state campaigns by early 2026, with leadership projecting total cycle expenditures of up to \$40 million nationwide. Key capital allocations include **a \$500,000 contribution in September 2025 to People Not Politicians**, an anti-gerrymandering campaign in Missouri, alongside two seed contributions of \$150,000 each (\$300,000 total) to Protect MI Constitution from Special Interests. These funds constituted virtually 100% of the Michigan committee's working capital during its initial reporting periods.

Global Impact Social Welfare Fund

The Global Impact Social Welfare Fund (GISWF) is a 501(c)(4) social welfare organization (EIN: 92-0652730) operating as a fiscally sponsored project of Global Impact (EIN: 52-1273585), a 501(c)(3) non-profit administrator headquartered in Alexandria, Virginia, and Washington, D.C.. Global Impact provides fiscal sponsorship, donor-advised fund (DAF) administration, and back-office management for over 120 client organizations, allowing subsidiary projects like GISWF to receive and disburse substantial sums without individual donor identification.

Public tax filings, including Global Impact's 2023 Form 990, show that GISWF's primary financial engine is the **Hopewell Fund**, a 501(c)(3) public charity managed by **Arabella Advisors**. In 2023, the Hopewell Fund issued an \$18,446,580 grant to Global Impact for civil rights, social action, and advocacy. Global Impact subsequently routed these resources into its 501(c)(4) arm, GISWF, which acts as a funding conduit for state ballot initiatives and electoral advocacy campaigns nationwide.

Beyond its \$5.1 million transfer to The Fairness Project in 2025, GISWF has directed funding into state-level ballot operations, including \$500,000 to Way Back PAC and \$2 million to the Western Futures Fund in Wyoming, \$2.62 million to Montanans Securing Reproductive Rights, \$100,000 to Montanans for Nonpartisan Courts, and financial support for Conservation Voters for Idaho and the Boise Fact Check PAC. The ultimate institutional grantors funding the Hopewell Fund and its associated **Arabella networks** include philanthropic entities such as the Susan Thompson Buffett Foundation (which provided a \$3.12 million grant), the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and the James Irvine Foundation.

The 2026 Michigan Constitutional Convention Referendum Mechanics and Coalition Dynamics

Section 3 of Article XII of the Michigan Constitution requires that an automatic referral question appear on the ballot every 16 years, asking voters whether to convene a constitutional convention to revise or amend the state's founding document. Approved by voters in 1960, this automatic mechanism appeared on the statewide ballot in 1978, 1994, and 2010, where voters rejected the call by a margin of 66.6% to 33.4%. If approved by a simple majority on November 3, 2026, Proposal 1 sets in motion a structured constitutional process. Within six months of election certification, Michigan voters would elect 148 convention delegates—one from each state House and Senate district. These delegates would assemble in Lansing on October 5, 2027, to organize the convention, establish operational rules, and draft proposed constitutional modifications.

Unlike legislature-proposed amendments or narrow citizen initiatives, a constitutional convention possesses broad authority to propose either targeted amendments or a complete rewrite of the state constitution. However, delegates possess proposal power rather than final approval authority. Any revisions or amendments drafted by the convention must be submitted to statewide voters for approval or rejection in a separate election held no less than 90 days after the convention adjourns.

To defeat Proposal 1, opponents established the ballot question committee Protect MI Constitution from Special Interests. Publicly, the committee promotes itself as a broad-based, nonpartisan coalition defending the public against special interests. Its roster of endorsing organizations includes public sector and trade unions such as the Michigan Education Association (MEA) and the Michigan AFL-CIO; business associations including the Michigan Chamber of Commerce and Business Leaders for Michigan; and advocacy groups such as the League of Women Voters of Michigan, the Michigan League of Conservation Voters, and the Michigan Democratic Party. The committee's operational team features bipartisan political strategists, including former Michigan Republican Party Executive Director and Lincoln Project advisor Jeff Timmer, alongside communications personnel from the administrations of former Republican Governor John Engler and sitting Democratic Governor Gretchen Whitmer.

Despite this array of local endorsements, campaign finance disclosures filed with the Michigan Secretary of State reveal a contrast between public organizational backing and financial contributions. **Through early 2026, none of the listed Michigan-based supporting organizations had provided cash or in-kind contributions to the ballot committee.** Instead, virtually all of the committee's funding originated from American Opportunity Action, which supplied two \$150,000 transfers (\$300,000 total) to open the campaign. By July 2026, total opposition contributions reached \$862,050.98, with total expenditures of \$449,592.93, driven almost entirely by out-of-state 501(c)(4) dark money entities.

Strategic and Policy Motives Behind Opposition to a "Yes" Vote

Preserving Recent Constitutional Victories

Over the past decade, progressive advocacy networks, labor organizations, and civil rights groups have invested tens of millions of dollars into successful Michigan ballot initiative campaigns. These campaigns established significant constitutional provisions, including:

- Proposal 2 of 2018, which created an independent citizens redistricting commission, removing congressional and state legislative redistricting authority from the state legislature.
- Proposal 2 of 2022, which enshrined nine days of early voting, state-funded mail ballot postage, and photo identification protections in the state constitution.
- Proposal 3 of 2022, which established an explicit state constitutional right to reproductive freedom and abortion access.
- Multiple citizen-initiated measures expanding minimum wage thresholds and statutory labor protections.
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Because a constitutional convention possesses open-ended authority, delegates elected in 2027 would have the legal capacity to alter, revise, or eliminate any existing section of the Michigan Constitution. National 501(c)(4) organizations like American Opportunity Action, The Fairness Project, and the Global Impact network view an open convention as an unnecessary risk to these established constitutional protections. American Opportunity Action spokesperson Christina Reynolds articulated this strategic rationale, stating that the organization believes policies protecting healthcare, economic opportunity, and reproductive rights "are best protected and passed under Michigan's current state Constitution, not one that is controlled and written by special interests".

Safeguarding Legislative Gatekeeping and Institutional Access

Under standard conditions, proposed constitutional amendments must clear significant institutional barriers. Legislature-proposed amendments require a two-thirds supermajority vote in both houses of the state legislature before reaching the ballot. Citizen-initiated amendments bypass the legislature but require signature-gathering efforts costing millions of dollars or thousands of volunteer hours. Established interest

groups—including corporate trade associations and labor unions—possess lobbying infrastructure, political action committees, and relationships with state lawmakers that enable them to exercise gatekeeping influence over legislative constitutional proposals. A constitutional convention circumvents these traditional gatekeepers. Convention delegates are elected independently of the state legislature, eliminating lawmakers' inherent conflict of interest regarding their own powers, term limits, and legislative oversight. At a convention, an elected delegate can propose structural modifications simply by raising a hand on the floor. Political leaders, state legislators, and established lobbying coalitions generally view an independent constituent assembly as a threat to their established gatekeeping power over constitutional change.

Industry Avoidance of Economic and Policy Instability

For business associations such as Business Leaders for Michigan and the Michigan Chamber of Commerce, a constitutional convention introduces multi-year economic and regulatory unpredictability. Subjects that could be re-opened during a general constitutional revision include:

- Structural tax policy, including the Headlee Amendment tax caps, local property tax assessment limits, sales tax rates, and the state's flat income tax mandate.
- Labor and employment regulations, including collective bargaining rights and prevailing wage rules.
- Environmental regulation standards and public utility oversight mechanisms.
- Governance and constitutional autonomy for major public research universities, such as the University of Michigan, Michigan State University, and Wayne State University.
- Judicial selection processes, specifically whether state judges should remain elected or transition to an appointed system.

Because commercial enterprises depend on legal stability to allocate long-term capital, corporate interest groups join labor unions in opposing the convention call, preferring known legislative channels over an open-ended constitutional revision.

Capital Allocation Efficiency for National Advocacy Networks

National dark money networks operate with strategic capital allocation targets across all 50 states. If Proposal 1 passes in November 2026, national progressive and labor organizations would be forced to deploy tens of millions of dollars into defensive state campaigns:

- Funding 148 individual delegate campaigns across Michigan's House and Senate districts in early 2027.
- Running a statewide campaign in 2028 to pass or defeat whatever revised constitution or amendments emerge from the Lansing assembly.
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This defensive drain on capital would divert funds away from offensive ballot measure campaigns in other target states, such as minimum wage or redistricting initiatives in Missouri, Virginia, or Ohio. Defeating Proposal 1 in 2026 allows these 501(c)(4)

networks to contain political spending and preserve their existing policy investments at a fraction of the cost.

Political Framing and Reverse-Accusation Messaging

To defeat convention referendums, opposition campaigns frequently deploy fear-based messaging. In Michigan, the opposition committee chose the name Protect MI Constitution from Special Interests.

This naming convention reflects a calculated rhetorical tactic: framing the convention as a dangerous mechanism controlled by "wealthy special interests" or "out-of-state billionaires" who will strip away citizens' rights. This strategy functions as a reverse accusation—accusing convention proponents of the exact flaw that characterizes the anti-convention campaign itself. While accusing convention supporters of being driven by special interests, the anti-convention committee relies almost entirely on out-of-state dark money provided by Washington, D.C.-based 501(c)(4) political operatives.

Comparative Analysis of Entities, Leadership, and Financial Flows

Entity Name	Primary Tax Status & Location	Key Leadership & Operatives	Primary Funding Sources & Parent Networks	Role in Michigan Constitutional Convention Opposition
Protect MI Constitution from Special Interests	State Ballot Question Committee (Michigan)	Jeff Timmer (Lincoln Project advisor); former Engler (R) and Whitmer (D) staff	American Opportunity Action (provides ~100% of initial cash receipts)	Official campaign committee executing the statewide "No" vote campaign against Proposal 1.
American Opportunity Action	501(c)(4) Social Welfare Org (Washington, DC)	Preston Elliott (Principal Officer / Hochul Campaign Manager); Christina Reynolds	Undisclosed individual and institutional dark money donors; allied Democratic	Primary direct funder; supplied \$300,000 in initial seed capital to the Michigan anti-convention

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			operative networks	ballot committee.
The Fairness Project	501(c)(4) Social Welfare Org (Washington, DC)	Labor-backed leadership team	Global Impact Social Welfare Fund (\$5.1M in 2025); Sixteen Thirty Fund (\$1.4M+); SEIU, UFCW, AFT	Interconnected national ballot campaign funder; aligns with national network preserving existing state constitutional amendments.
Global Impact Social Welfare Fund	501(c)(4) Social Welfare Org (Alexandria, VA)	Fiscally sponsored project of Global Impact (EIN: 52-1273585)	Hopewell Fund / Arabella Advisors network (\$18.4M grant in 2023); Susan Thompson Buffett Foundation	Intermediary pass-through grantmaker; channels Arabella network capital into national ballot platforms, including \$5.1M to The Fairness Project.

Conclusion

The mobilization against Michigan's 2026 constitutional convention referendum underscores a broader structural dynamic in contemporary state governance: the tension between direct constituent power and the risk-mitigation strategies of established political networks. Michigan's framers established the periodic 16-year convention referral specifically to resolve the legislature's inherent conflict of interest in designing its own powers and constraining competing branches of government. By providing a periodic, independently elected convention, the constitution offers citizens

an unmediated mechanism to enact structural reforms that legislative gatekeepers would otherwise block.

However, the modern state ballot landscape is heavily influenced by national campaign finance networks. Out-of-state 501(c)(4) dark money entities—such as American Opportunity Action, The Fairness Project, and the Global Impact / Arabella Advisors ecosystem—view Proposal 1 not as a neutral civic exercise, but as an unpredictable threat to recent constitutional victories.

By financing the Protect MI Constitution from Special Interests committee, these out-of-state advocacy networks have formed an alliance with state business associations, public sector labor unions, and political party leadership. Their shared objective is to secure a "No" vote on November 3, 2026, preserving the existing constitutional document and insulating state policy from the uncertainties of an independent, citizen-led revision process.