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NEWS

Bradley Foundation Bankrolls Controversial Billboards, Treading onto Controversial New Ground

by [Brendan Fischer](#) — November 2, 2012 - 8:04am

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Although the [Einhorn Family Foundation](#) admitted to being the "private family foundation" behind the controversial "Voter Fraud is a Felony!" billboards that recently appeared in neighborhoods of color in Milwaukee and two Ohio cities, news broke Wednesday they secured the funds for similar billboards in 2010 from the Milwaukee-based [Bradley Foundation](#), a major funder of right-wing organizations that push the voter fraud myth.

The 2010 election installed [Scott Walker](#) as governor of Wisconsin, and the president and CEO of the [Bradley Foundation](#), Michael Grebe, was Walker's campaign chairman. Now, under Grebe's leadership, the Bradley

Foundation's appears to be moving into increasingly controversial territory. The voter billboards were seen by many as a direct attempt to sow confusion and suppress the vote in largely Democratic communities.

Billboard Funders No Longer Anonymous

The Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel's [Dan Bice](#) confirmed the \$10,000 that Bradley gave the Einhorn Family Foundation in 2010 funded the controversial "Voter Fraud is a Felony!" messages. "The grant was for general purposes but it was, in fact, used for those billboards," Grebe told Bice in an email.

The Bradley Foundation's 2012 grant reports are not yet available and it is not known whether they also funded the nearly identical billboards that have appeared in recent months. Those billboards, selectively placed in neighborhoods of color, were widely denounced as voter suppression by civil rights groups, including the online group [Color of Change](#), and in mid-October [Clear Channel](#) (owned by [Bain Capital](#)) agreed to take down the ads, citing a policy against anonymous advertisements.

Last week, [One Wisconsin Now](#) and the [Grio.com](#) identified the Einhorn Family Foundation as the group that bought the ads and questioned if Bradley were involved.

On October 31, Bice confirmed Bradley as a funder.

"It raises serious questions about how the Bradley Foundation spends its money," said [Scot Ross](#), Executive Director of [One Wisconsin Now](#).

Bradley Foundation Increasingly Funding Apparatchicks and Fringe Groups

The Milwaukee-based Bradley Foundation is one of the nation's largest funders of conservative causes and organizations, giving approximately \$30 million in grants each year -- which makes it an even bigger player than the Koch family foundations.

The Foundation is led by Michael Grebe, who chaired Walker's 2010 campaign, led his gubernatorial transition team, and chaired the campaign again in Walker's 2012 recall election. Grebe was also on the Republican National Committee for many years and the state GOP chairman in the late 1980s. Bradley's board of directors also includes North Carolina businessman [Art Pope](#), who is closely tied to the Koch Brothers and is one of four national directors of the Koch-founded [Americans for Prosperity](#), as well as conservative Washington Post columnist [George Will](#) and former M&I Bank CEO [Dennis Kuester](#).

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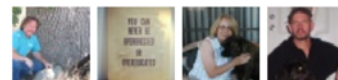


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Bradley has been traditionally regarded as a relatively mainstream political funder, best known for backing "school choice" initiatives that would privatize public education, as well as donating to think tanks like the [Manhattan Institute](#) and the [Heritage Foundation](#). However, Grebe told the *Journal-Sentinel* last year he is moving the foundation in new directions, and is "looking for more ways to affect the popular culture with these ideas so that we're not appealing just to the elites, but we're also attempting to appeal to a broader population." This strategy apparently involves funding inflammatory right-wing groups and causes -- like the billboards -- that specialize in generating controversy.



Michael Grebe

In 2010, Bradley gave [American Majority](#) \$328,000, \$173,000 of which was earmarked to start "Media Trackers," a right-wing political "media watchdog" website that echoes [Breitbart.com](#). Media Trackers recently made headlines for publishing a [libelous smear](#) about the spouse of a Democratic candidate for Congress. Bradley has also given at least \$5.3 million to groups that promote anti-Islamic sentiment in the United States, such as the [Center for Security Policy](#), whose founder and president has made the preposterous claim that the U.S. military's missile defense logo is proof of President Obama's "submission to Sharia" law and claimed the right-wing Conservative Political Action Conference had been infiltrated by the Muslim Brotherhood because anti-tax activist Grover Norquist's wife is Muslim. It is also a major funder of the [Heartland Institute](#), the Illinois-based think tank that [ran billboards](#) earlier this year linking those who are concerned about climate change to mass murderers and terrorists.

Billboards, Bradley Promote Discredited "Voter Fraud" Myth

The Bradley Foundation-funded billboards are premised on the notion that voter fraud is a serious problem - and based on the placement of the ads, that it primarily happens in neighborhoods of color. Despite these claims, [there is no evidence](#) of any coordinated or statistically significant voter fraud in Wisconsin (or anywhere else). But Bradley has given millions to organizations that promote the "voter fraud" myth.

In Wisconsin, for example, Bradley has been a primary funder of the [MacIver Institute](#), a right-wing think tank that along with the Bradley-funded Media Trackers [hyped claims of voter fraud](#) in advance of last June's recall elections. MacIver received \$360,000 from Bradley in its first three years of existence, and with David Koch's [Americans for Prosperity](#) (which has received tens of thousands from Bradley), also [ran a multi-million-dollar ad campaign](#) supporting Governor Walker's policies. After Walker and three Republican senators survived their recall elections, none on the right questioned the legitimacy of their victories -- but in the one district where a Republican lost, GOP leaders and these Bradley-funded outlets [declared](#) that voter fraud tainted the results.

Bradley also offered funding to the discredited Texas-based Tea Party group [True the Vote](#), which released [sloppy and inaccurate data about fraud](#) in the Wisconsin recall petition drive, and stoked fears of voter fraud during the recall election (and is continuing to do so on the national level). They've also hosted fundraisers with Matthew Vadum of the Bradley-funded Capital Research Center, who has argued that "registering the poor to vote is un-American." True the Vote [returned](#) Bradley's \$35,000 contribution last year since it had not been granted 501(c)(3) status.

Bradley Funds ALEC, Which Promotes Voter ID

The Bradley Foundation has also given \$220,000 to the [American Legislative Exchange Council](#) (ALEC) between 2009 and 2011. ALEC's model [Voter ID Act](#) appeared to serve as a template for the dozens of voter ID bills introduced in a majority of statehouses since 2011 -- legislation that, like the billboards, is purportedly aimed at preventing the nonexistent threat of "voter fraud."

Wisconsin passed a strict ALEC-inspired voter ID law in May 2011 that threatened to disenfranchise hundreds of thousands of people of color and students. Two separate Wisconsin courts struck down the law as an unconstitutional burden on the right to vote.

In his decision, Dane County Judge David Flanagan found that the potential burden on voters from Wisconsin's voter ID law was great, but the risk of voter fraud very limited, noting that despite repeated investigations in recent years by prosecutors and law enforcement from both parties, "None of these efforts have produced a prosecution of a voter fraud violation that would have been prevented by the voter ID requirements." The voter ID law, he said pointedly, "addresses a problem which is very limited, if indeed it exists."

"Two Heads on the Same Monster"

The other judge to strike down Wisconsin's law, Judge Richard Niess, noted that "voter fraud is no more poisonous to our democracy than voter suppression. Indeed, they are two heads on the same monster."

Under Grebe's leadership, the Bradley Foundation is increasingly moving away from funding traditional conservative causes that advance legitimate public policy options, and towards funding controversial groups that specialize in political hijinks and smears.

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