

## FEDERATION FOR AMERICAN IMMIGRATION REFORM (FAIR)

**IMPACT:** The Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) is a nonprofit organization of nearly fifty private foundations and over 1.9 million members and supporters that lobbies for large-scale immigration reductions. FAIR's stated objective is to reduce overall immigration to 300,000 a year over a sustained period and the group has argued against birthright citizenship, the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), and the admittance of Syrian refugees, and praised immigration restrictions issued by the Trump administration. A number of FAIR's current and former employees are connected to white nationalists such as Peter Brimelow and Jared Taylor, and have previously provided a platform for anti-Muslim actors Robert Spencer and Sebastian Gorka.

- The Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) was founded in 1979 by ophthalmologist John Tanton, Jr. and claims a membership of “nearly 50 private foundations and over 1.9 million diverse members and supporters.” **FAIR believes that reduced immigration would benefit the United States’ “national security, economy, workforce, education, healthcare system, and environment.”** The group lobbies for policies to “reduce overall immigration to a more normal level,” defined as 300,000 people a year.
- Tanton’s close relationship to Cordelia Scaife May, an heiress to the Mellon fortune, yielded sizable donations from May’s Colcom Foundation. Between 2009 and 2014, May’s Colcom Foundation donated a yearly average of \$3.6 million to FAIR; in 2015 Colcom donated over \$7.4 million, which accounted for 87 percent of FAIR’s total annual revenue. The Colcom Foundation has provided millions to anti-immigration and population-control groups; in 2016 alone the foundation made donations over \$20.5 million, of which \$19.1 million went to organizations founded by Tanton, including FAIR, the Center for Immigration Studies, and NumbersUSA. From 1985 to 1994, FAIR also received funding from the Pioneer Fund, a group controversial for funding eugenicists and efforts to prove the existence of “white intellectual superiority.”
- FAIR utilizes a mixture of media campaigns, congressional testimonies, and lobbying efforts to push its anti-immigrant agenda. FAIR campaigns expound upon numerous topics, including the allegedly negative impacts of immigrant workers in the United States, the benefits of constructing a wall on the Southern border, and instances of violent crimes committed by undocumented immigrants. **Although FAIR describes itself as “free of party loyalties,” it has been criticized for publishing false information on immigration.** In 2017, the right-leaning CATO Institute described a FAIR study on the impact of illegal immigration as “fatally flawed.” FAIR’s Twitter account frequently retweets articles by Breitbart News and The Daily Wire. Steven Bannon has claimed that Breitbart is a “platform for the alt-right,” and The Daily Wire is a news site founded by Ben Shapiro, who has a history of making derogatory, generalizing, and inflammatory comments about Muslims, Arabs, African Americans, transgender people, and others.
- According to FAIR’s website, since 1979 it “has been asked to provide testimony before congressional committees more than 90 times on virtually every aspect of immigration policy ... [and] FAIR has [also] been invited to appear before state and local legislatures, blue ribbon panels and commissions.” Additionally, FAIR publishes dozens of articles a year in a variety of news outlets and distributes podcasts, press kits, video campaigns, and press releases on its website. FAIR field staff organize public meetings and speeches around the country and the Immigration Reform Law Institute, FAIR’s legal affiliate, claims to work “extensively with state and local governments to design legislation.”
- **Current FAIR president Daniel Stein has long expressed criticism of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. The act, which ended America’s national-origins quota system, was lauded for repairing an immigration system that favored European immigrants over others.** In a 1994 interview with Tanton, Stein stated that the immigration reforms issued by U.S. Senator Edward Kennedy, which included the 1965 Act, were a form of “revengism” and “a great way to retaliate against Anglo-Saxon dominance.”
- In 1984, Tanton donated hundreds of pieces of correspondence to University of Michigan’s Bentley Historical Library. From 1985 to 1994, FAIR received funding from the Pioneer Fund, a group that has previously attracted controversy for funding eugenicists and efforts to prove the existence of “white intellectual superiority.” Tanton’s papers include letters to controversial ecologist and writer Garrett Hardin, white nationalist Peter Brimelow, and more.

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- In a June 1982 letter,<sup>1</sup> the FAIR Board of Directors expressed dissatisfaction with a Supreme Court decision which found children of undocumented immigrants to be entitled to public school, concluding, “Free education is certain to further stimulate the flow of illegal aliens to the U.S.” In the letter, the board also expressed dissatisfaction with a [court decision](#) to release 2,000 detained Haitians claiming political asylum, claiming, “the Justice Department has added another chapter to the long history of supine government submission to special interests, in this case the immigration lawyers’ guild.”
- In a September 1986 memo<sup>2</sup> for the FAIR Board of Directors, Tanton proposed the idea of picketing businesses that employed undocumented immigrants, writing, “As we consider moving into a new and less polite phase of the immigration reform movement, I have been looking for businesses that employ illegal aliens that we might picket ... I can’t imagine that they would want the adverse publicity, and I can imagine that the prospect of it would get us into see the president.”
- In a November 1990 letter,<sup>3</sup> Tanton encouraged Stein to consider incorporating personal narratives for FAIR’s arguments against immigration: “Our opposition has long had the advantage of being able to tell the personal story, complete with photographs, of the distressed immigrant or refugee. These often pluck the heart-strings, and illicit sympathy for their side of the immigration debate. In contrast, we often end up dealing in statistics ... There are however a good many personal histories or statements that could be made on our side ... for instance of the two black maids in Miami who are unable to get a job because they didn’t speak Spanish, or even of Jerry Mackie’s losing his job in the Northwest when illegals came in.”
- In the mid-1990s FAIR produced a television talk show called “[Borderline](#).” **According to the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), several episodes of this program featured members of FAIR leadership, including Stein, discussing immigration with Peter Brimelow, Jared Taylor, and Sam Francis—three individuals who have espoused white nationalist views and are labeled white nationalists by the SPLC and news outlets such as BuzzFeed and CNN.**
- Current FAIR [media director](#) Ira Mehlman wrote [an approving review](#) of Brimelow’s book Alien Nation. In the book Brimelow [argues](#), “Race is destiny in American politics... [and] any change in the racial balance must obviously be fraught with consequences for the survival and success of the American nation.” Brimelow advocates a decrease in non-white immigration, arguing that expanding multiculturalism is dangerous to the United States. He describes FAIR as a “patriot” group and says that “the future of the American nation will depend” upon groups such as it.
- In 2018, then-press secretary of FAIR Joe Gomez [resigned](#) from his position, alleging that FAIR discriminated against him on the basis of his race, national origin, and disability. **Gomez claimed he was subjected to “racial comments, racially charged comments, [and] racial slurs,” and described an instance where a coworker volunteered to masquerade as an “illegal alien from Mexico” by covering herself in mud.** In February 2019, the Washington Post [reported](#) that Gomez reached a settlement with FAIR, which shared a signed [retraction](#) of claims of unlawful conduct from Gomez. **Gomez’s lawyer, Chris Bell, claimed that FAIR “incorrectly characterized the settlement in emails to the media, wrongly saying the D.C. Office of Human Rights dismissed the complaint because it had no merit.”**
- **In early 2019 another former press secretary for FAIR published an article claiming that ranchers living along the southern border of the United States had found prayer rugs in areas with frequent border crossings.** Washington Post journalists Abby Ohlheiser and Lindsey Bever [pointed out](#) that the article, which provided no evidence for its claims, was based on a decade-old conspiracy theory and was intended to stoke fears about Muslims and immigrants: “It is a claim that conflates an item used by some practicing Muslims with a sign of terrorists — the false implication being that any association with the Islamic faith is itself worthy of suspicion.”
- Since 2006, FAIR has [hosted](#) the annual Hold Their Feet to the Fire conference (HTFTTF) in Washington D.C. FAIR’s website describes the HTFTTF conference as an opportunity for radio and television talk-show hosts to gather and discuss the [“burgeoning problem of illegal immigration,”](#) and refers to the conference as an opportunity to resolve the “immigration problem.” **The HTFTTF Conference provides a platform for some of the country’s**

<sup>1</sup> John Tanton Archive, University of Michigan Bentley Historical Library, Boxes 1 - 14, as reproduced by IREHR

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

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**best known anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant actors.** In 2017, white nationalist [Robert Spencer](#) spoke at the HTFTTF conference and described Islam in an [interview](#) with right-wing talk show host Sandy Rios as “an ideology that’s been a raid against the West for 1400 years.” In a different [interview](#) in 2017, Matt O’Brien, director of research at FAIR, [appeared](#) on the same radio program.

- [Sebastian Gorka](#), a former deputy assistant to [President Donald Trump](#) who supports religious profiling, has targeted Muslim civil rights and advocacy groups, and has publicly worn a medal affiliated with a Nazi-linked Hungarian group, attended HTFTTF in 2017 and 2018. In an official FAIR [podcast](#), Dan Stein and Director of Communications Dave Ray described him as a celebrity who “brings an incredible view of the immigration movement.” In June 2020, CNN [reported](#) that there was “some discussion among the president’s advisers about making Gorka a [U.S. Agency for Global Media] board member” and “assuming a leadership position in [Voice of America](#).” In July 2020, Trump [appointed](#) Gorka to the [National Security Education Board](#) instead.
- **FAIR has [argued](#) against the admittance of Syrian refugees into the United States. In a report discussing refugee resettlement from “high risk” countries such as Syria and Iran, FAIR states that “not all people who are fleeing dangerous situations are innocent victims.”** Instead, it argues that “they may be fleeing for their lives, but had the outcomes of these conflicts been different, they might be committing atrocities and it might be the other guys fleeing.”
- **In response to then-presidential candidate Trump’s call for a “total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States,” FAIR’s [official response](#) pushed negative rhetoric about Muslim immigrants:** “Both here and in other Western democracies, we are witnessing the radicalization of immigrants and their children in mosques that spread ideologies that are antithetical to those societies. The fact that these domestic incubators of Islamic radicalism are having a greater influence on recently arrived immigrants and their children than the values on which this country was founded is worrisome.”
- In a November 2016 report titled [Immigration Priorities for the 2017 Presidential Transition](#), FAIR blamed uncontrolled immigration for “the costs of urban sprawl, environmental degradation, traffic congestion, increased crime, overburdened health care, overwhelmed public schools and debt-ridden state and municipal governments.” **Among other proposals, FAIR argued that birthright citizenship should be ended, amnesty should not be granted, the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program should be revoked, a physical barrier should be constructed along the southern and northern borders, and state and local law enforcement should play a role in immigration enforcement.** The report was co-authored by Robert Law, chief of the Office of Policy and Strategy for U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). Prior to his role at USCIS, Law [worked](#) as the lobbying director and director of government relations for FAIR, where he “denigrated Dreamers, argued that the United States should end birthright citizenship, and recommended that the government reduce the number of refugees and immigrants coming into the country.”
- **In several op-eds for The Hill, Law [praised](#) Trump’s immigration policies, [criticized](#) sanctuary cities, and [argued](#) against DACA.** He [states](#) in one, “While the president’s tough rhetoric on illegal immigration has already dramatically reduced the flow of unlawful border crossings, constructing a physical barrier — whether you call it a wall, fence, or something else — is necessary to prevent the flood gates of illegal immigration from reopening under a different administration.” As [noted](#) by Media Matters for America, Law’s articles “also frequently used the anti-immigrant slur ‘illegal alien’ to demean undocumented immigrants.”
- **Several other FAIR members, associates, and former staff have also served in the Trump administration.** Julie Kircher, who “worked at FAIR for nearly 10 years before joining Trump’s presidential campaign as an immigration adviser,” [served](#) as the Department of Homeland Security citizenship and immigration ombudsman from 2017 to 2019. In June 2020, Matthew O’Brien, a former director of research at FAIR, was [appointed](#) as an immigration judge by Attorney General William Barr. According to [reporting](#) in VICE News, “at least five other key advisers to President Trump on immigration have ties to FAIR ... [including] [Jeff Sessions](#), [Kris Kobach](#), [Kellyanne Conway](#), [Stephen Miller](#), and Lou Barletta.”
- FAIR has criticized the Supreme Court’s June 2020 decision to [uphold](#) DACA. Stein stated in a [press release](#): “The duly enacted laws of our nation, then and now, are clear that DACA beneficiaries are illegal aliens who have no legal right to live and work in this country, and are subject to removal.” FAIR Immigration Policy Analyst Pawel Styrna [wrote](#) in The Hill that DACA is “a bad policy that rewards illegal migration, flouts the rule of law, and is unjust towards American citizens.” **According to [reporting](#) by**

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NPR, “200 major corporations filed briefs in the Supreme Court supporting the DACA recipients” and recent polling for DACA shows “up to 85% support among Democratic and independent voters, and huge majorities among Republican voters as well.”

- **FAIR has also used the rise of COVID-19 to argue for immigration reduction and increased border security.** In May 2020, FAIR published a [letter](#) to President Donald Trump requesting that he “issue a new executive order suspending the admission of guestworkers ... to protect American workers at a time of crisis.” In June 2020, Trump signed an [executive order continuing](#) “restrictions on entry for new green-card holders (‘immigrants’) and restrict[ing] new authorization for ‘nonimmigrant’ visas through the end of the year.”
- Following the issue of the executive order, FAIR released a statement praising Trump for his decision. Stein stated: “Today’s Proclamation suspending the admission of foreign guest workers is welcome news for the tens of millions of Americans who have lost jobs as a result of the COVID-19 crisis .... President Trump is using his suspension authority in precisely the manner envisioned by the congressional framers of our immigration law, who envisioned such an economic crisis.” Trump’s limitations on immigration have been met with pushback, including from [members of Congress](#) and [tech companies](#) such as Google, Twitter, and Amazon.

Bridge Initiative Factsheet