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# Citizens for Self-Governance

**Citizens for Self-Governance** (CSG) is a right-wing political organization tied to [Eric O'Keefe](#) that is campaigning for an Article V convention to amend the U.S. Constitution.

CSG's website states that it "will elevate awareness and provide resources, advocacy, and education to support organizations and individuals exercising their rights to govern themselves."<sup>[1]</sup> CSG has sued the IRS over its investigation of whether certain politically active organizations were incorrectly filing as non-profits.<sup>[2]</sup>


Through its "Convention of States" project, CSG promotes an effort to amend the U.S. Constitution pursuant to Article V, which provides that thirty-four states (two-thirds) can trigger a convention to propose an amendment, which must then be ratified by 38 states (three-fourths).<sup>[3]</sup>

CSG Director [Eric O'Keefe](#) has deep ties to Charles and [David Koch](#) and has been a founder and funder of numerous right-wing groups including [Wisconsin Club for Growth](#), which is central to the so-called "[John Doe](#)" [criminal probe](#) involving Governor [Scott Walker](#). O'Keefe has fought back against the probe through the press and the courts, and CSG launched the website [WisconsinJohnDoe.com](#) in 2015.<sup>[4]</sup> CSG also reportedly funded a variety of lawsuits connected to the John Doe, including a 2014 lawsuit in Wisconsin to end enforcement of a state campaign finance law.<sup>[5]</sup>

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## Ties to the American Legislative Exchange Council

CSG was a "Chairman" level sponsor of the 2013 annual conference of the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) in Chicago. That level of sponsorship, which cost an estimated \$50,000, included four invitations to all VIP events, four conference registrations, a VIP photo opportunity, advertising, and the opportunity to have a "workshop" with legislators or the introduction to one of its luncheons. CSG was also listed as a sponsor of ALEC's host committee that year.<sup>[6]</sup> (See the brochure [here](#). ) CSG was also listed as a sponsor for the 2014 ALEC conference in Washington, D.C., and paid for breakfast for ALEC legislators to

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hear [Mark Levin](#), radio host and president of the [Landmark Legal Foundation](#), urge state legislators to support a constitutional convention.<sup>[7]</sup>

## About ALEC

[ALEC](#) is a corporate bill mill. It is not just a lobby or a front group; it is much more powerful than that. Through ALEC, corporations hand state legislators their wishlists to benefit their bottom line. Corporations fund almost all of ALEC's operations. They pay for a seat on ALEC task forces where corporate lobbyists and special interest reps vote with elected officials to approve "model" bills. Learn more at the Center for Media and Democracy's [ALECexposed.org](#) [↗](#), and check out breaking news on our [PRWatch.org](#) site [↗](#).

## CSG Pushes Constitutional Convention at ALEC Conferences

CSG has held workshops on its constitutional amendment strategy during at least two ALEC conferences.<sup>[3]</sup> At the 2013 workshop, titled "Calling a Convention of the States: The Constitutional Check on the Abuses of Federal Power," CSG president Mark Meckler announced the launch of the Convention of States project.

## CSG Advises ALEC Members to Avoid "States' Rights" Language

In a workshop at the 2013 ALEC meeting, Michael Farris, a Senior Fellow at CSG, advised ALEC members on messaging and warned against the use of terms like "states rights."

"It's not about states rights, it's about local control," he said.

States rights is associated with slavery, Farris said, but by using terms like "local control," "you just steer the language in the proper direction."<sup>[8]</sup>

## Lawsuits

### CSG Funds Suit Against IRS Claiming Politically Active Nonprofits Unfairly Targeted (2013)

CSG funded a class action lawsuit filed in 2013 on behalf of a number of right-wing and Tea Party groups against the IRS.<sup>[2]</sup> The suit argues that the plaintiffs, who had filed for tax-exempt status as "social welfare" groups, were unfairly "targeted... for intensive and intrusive scrutiny" because of "their apparent dissent from the policies or ideology of the Executive Branch of the United State Government under its current Administration."<sup>[9]</sup> The plaintiffs sought "unspecified monetary damages for the IRS's alleged violation of the Privacy Act of 1974 and the First and Fifth Amendments of the U.S. Constitution," according to the *Chicago Tribune*.<sup>[10]</sup> As of July 2015, the suit had not been resolved.

During the 2012 election campaign, a number of groups that filed for tax-exempt status were flagged by the IRS for extra review over whether the groups were engaged primarily in political, rather than social welfare, activity.<sup>[11]</sup> An IRS field office in Ohio identified some organizations using a list of keywords, including "Tea Party" and "patriots," prompting accusations from right-wing groups that the reviews were partisan and politically motivated.<sup>[12]</sup> However, documents obtained by *USA Today* show that while the majority of groups that received extra scrutiny in 2010 were right-leaning, many liberal or progressive organizations were also flagged for review;<sup>[13]</sup> furthermore, many "social welfare nonprofits" stated on their IRS applications that they would not spend any money on activities related to the election, but did in fact spend funds on election-related advertising and activities, as *Pro Publica* reported, and politically active social welfare

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nonprofits spent some \$256 million during the 2012 elections.<sup>[11]</sup>

## CSG Funds Challenge to Wisconsin Law on Illegal Campaign Coordination

In a 2014 lawsuit that was funded by CSG, <sup>[5]</sup> [CRG Network](#) challenged the Wisconsin Government Accountability Board's (GAB) definition of illegal campaign coordination, claiming that it has a constitutional right to coordinate with political candidates. CRG Network, which does not disclose its donors, "told the court it want[ed] to collaborate with" several candidates for political office and to create a website and run ads in the 2014 election, according to the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*.<sup>[5]</sup>

The lawsuit addressed the issue at the heart of a [John Doe investigation](#) into possible illegal campaign coordination related to Wisconsin Governor [Scott Walker](#) and other groups including CSG board member Eric O'Keefe's [Wisconsin Club for Growth](#) (WiCFG).<sup>[14]</sup> One of O'Keefe's main complaints about the John Doe investigation, as described by his lawyer, [David Rivkin](#), is that it was "chilling" free speech and the ability of political organizations to raise and spend money in Wisconsin,<sup>[14]</sup> claims that were echoed by CRG Network's lawsuit.<sup>[5]</sup> CRG originally formed to pursue the recall effort that helped Walker become Milwaukee County Executive, and it has also been represented in this and other lawsuits by Rivkin.<sup>[15]</sup>

In October 2014, an order blocking enforcement of the coordination rule was issued by U.S. District Court Judge Rudolph Randa,<sup>[16]</sup> who as CMD reported regularly attended all-expenses paid "judicial junkets" funded by the [Charles G. Koch Charitable Foundation](#), the [Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation](#), and other ideological and corporate interests.<sup>[17]</sup> As of November 2014, the case is on hold while CRG Network petitions the Wisconsin Supreme Court to rule on how to interpret campaign finance law regarding coordination.<sup>[18]</sup>

## Campaign for a Constitutional Convention to Amend the U.S. Constitution

Through its Convention of States project, CSG is pushing for a constitutional convention in order to severely restrict federal power, for example by redefining the Commerce Clause to prohibit Congress from enacting child labor or anti-discrimination laws, or by adding a balanced budget requirement. CSG has promoted this strategy in workshops at the 2012 and 2013 annual conference of ALEC, which has published a "how-to" manual for an Article V constitutional amendment and offers a "model" resolution, the "Balanced Budget Amendment Resolution."<sup>[3]</sup>

## Personnel

As of July 2015: <sup>[19]</sup>

- [Mark Meckler](#), President, CEO, and Founder. Meckler, an attorney, is also a co-founder of [Tea Party Patriots](#) and contributes to [Breitbart.com](#) and [The American Spectator](#). Meckler received \$181,880 in compensation as consulting fees from CSG in FY 2013,<sup>[20]</sup> and \$97,250 in compensation from related organizations in FY 2012,<sup>[21]</sup> but no compensation was listed for FY 2011.<sup>[22]</sup>

## Board of Directors

According to 2013 tax filing: <sup>[20]</sup>

- [Tim Dunn](#), Director
- [Mark Meckler](#), President and CEO
- [Eric O'Keefe](#), Director

- Mark Rollins, Director

## Funding

CSG files its tax forms under the name John Hancock Committee for the States. CSG does not disclose its donors;<sup>[20]</sup> however, organizations that have reported making contributions to CSG include:

- Abell-Hanger Foundation: \$500 (2013, matching gifts program)<sup>[23]</sup>
- [DonorsTrust](#) : \$691,916.16 (2012)
- [Dunn's Foundation for the Advancement of Right Thinking](#) : \$250,000 (2011),<sup>[24]</sup> \$50,000 (2010) <sup>[25]</sup>
- Greater Houston Community Foundation (a donor-advised fund): \$1,164,268 (2012)<sup>[26]</sup> \$859,382 (2011)<sup>[27]</sup>
- Strake Foundation: \$2,500 (2013) <sup>[28]</sup>
- Vanguard Charitable Endowment Program (a donor-advised fund): \$1,600,000 (2013),<sup>[29]</sup> \$900,000 (2012)<sup>[30]</sup>

*Years listed indicate FY of tax filing and may not indicate calendar year grant was received.*

## Core Finances

### 2013<sup>[20]</sup>

- Total Revenues: \$2,254,811
- Total Expenses: \$2,122,662
  - Graves Bartle Marcus and Garrett LLC, Kansas City, MO: \$315,296 (legal fees)
  - Coalition Partners, N7130 North Lost Lake Road, Randolph, WI, 53956: \$240,000 (consulting) (The address listed is associated with [R.J. Johnson](#) , a political strategist who has advised Wisconsin Governor [Scott Walker](#) and [Wisconsin Club for Growth](#).)
- Net Assets: \$44,944

### 2012<sup>[21]</sup>

- Total Revenues: \$1,207,183
- Total Expenses: \$1,281,408
- Net Assets: \$-87,205

### 2011<sup>[22]</sup>

- Total Revenues: \$1,849,589
- Total Expenses: \$1,910,939
- Net Assets: \$-12,980

### 2010<sup>[31]</sup>

- Total Revenues: \$1,043,752
- Total Expenses: \$995,382
  - Langemark, Lafayette, CO: \$107,744 (public affairs/research)
  - Market Street, LLC, Arlington, VA: \$157,446 (public affairs/research)
- Net Assets: \$48,370

## Grants Made

**2013**<sup>[20]</sup>

None reported.

**2012**<sup>[21]</sup>

- 1851 Center for Constitutional Law: \$7,000
- The Head Spring Group: \$25,000
- [Lucy Burns Institute](#) : \$20,000 (The president of LBI, Leslie Graves, is the wife of CSG board member [Eric O'Keefe](#) .)
- [Sutherland Institute](#) : \$30,000
- [James Madison Institute for Public Policy Studies](#) : \$30,000

**2011**<sup>[22]</sup>

- 1851 Center for Constitutional Law: \$7,000
- [Tea Party Patriots](#) : \$50,000
- [Texas Public Policy Foundation](#) : \$124,000
- [James Madison Institute](#) : \$25,000

## Contact

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Websites: [www.selfgovern.com](http://www.selfgovern.com), [www.conventionofstates.com](http://www.conventionofstates.com), [www.suetheirs.com](http://www.suetheirs.com),  
[www.wisconsinjohnndoe.com](http://www.wisconsinjohnndoe.com)

Email: [info@selfgovern.com](mailto:info@selfgovern.com)

Telephone: (512) 943-2014

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/Citizens4sg](http://www.facebook.com/Citizens4sg)

Twitter: [@Self\\_Governance](https://twitter.com/Self_Governance)

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  23. ↑ Abell-Hanger Foundation, [2013 IRS Form 990](#), tax filing, November 14, 2014.
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  25. ↑ Dunn's Foundation for the Advancement of Right Thinking, [2011 IRS Form 990](#), tax filing, April 16, 2012.
  26. ↑ Greater Houston Community Foundation, [2012 IRS Form 990](#), tax filing, May 13, 2013. Grant purposes included \$4,268 for Tocqueville Project, and remainder for overhead expenses.
  27. ↑ Greater Houston Community Foundation, [2011 IRS Form 990](#), tax filing, August 7, 2012. Grant purposes included \$285,000 for research and education, \$5,636 and \$3,494 for Tocqueville Project payroll in September and October 2011, \$200,000 for operation costs through the end of December, \$360,000 for overhead, and \$5,252 for payroll and services provided by Aquinas Companies.
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