

The Arabella Tentacles Reaching Into Montana

How Out-of-State Dark Money Tied To Leftist Groups Built a Campaign Machine Inside Montana's Republican Primaries (Article 3 in a series about leftist dark money groups trying to capture Montana)

By Montana Sentinel Press

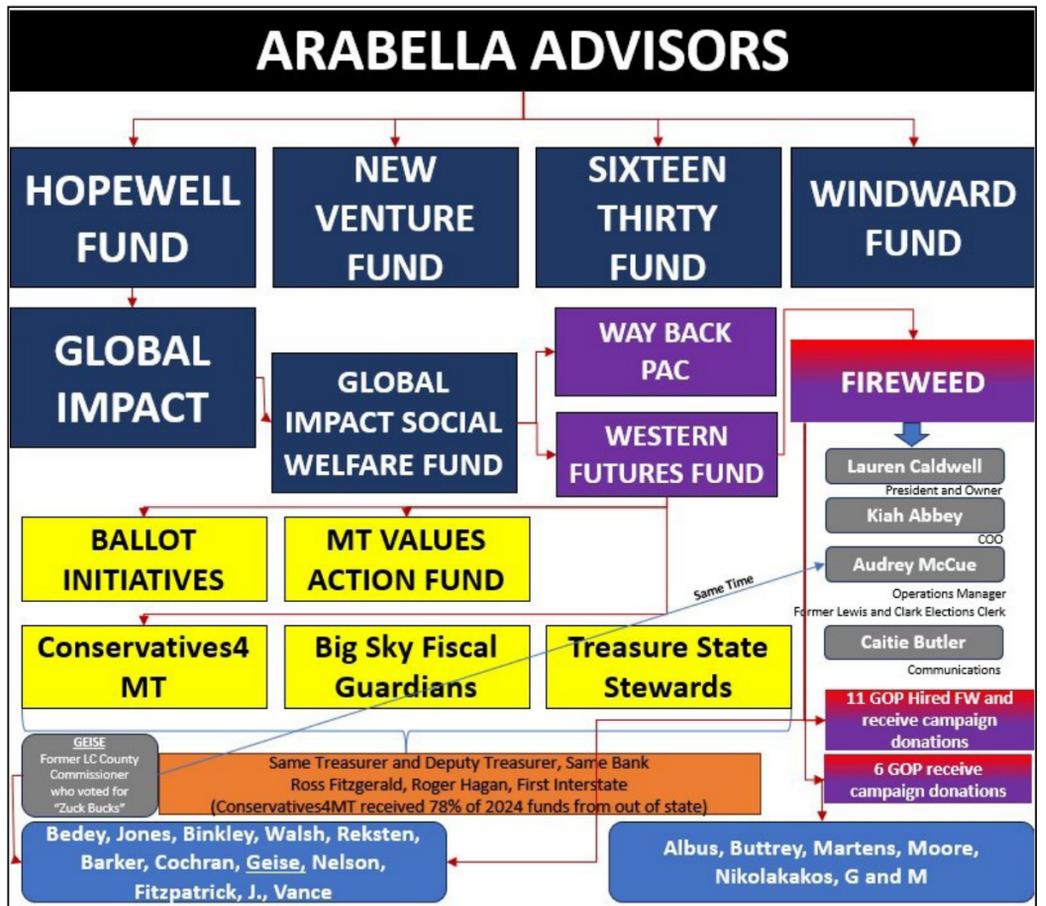
The National Pipeline

The Arabella Advisors network is the largest dark money infrastructure in the United States, with roughly \$5 billion in total revenue between 2019 and 2022 flowing through four managed nonprofits: the Hopewell Fund, New Venture Fund, Sixteen Thirty Fund, and Windward Fund. Major institutional funders include the Berger Action Fund (Swiss billionaire Hansjörg Wyss, the largest identified donor), the Susan Thompson Buffett Foundation (\$27 million to Hopewell Fund in 2018 alone), the Open Society Foundations, and others. In November 2025, Arabella rebranded as Sunflower Services; its operations remain functionally unchanged.

Tax filings trace a specific pipeline from this network into Montana. The Hopewell Fund granted \$18.4 million to Global Impact of Alexandria, Virginia (Form 990, Schedule I). Global Impact's 501(c)(4) subsidiary, the Global Impact Social Welfare Fund (GISWF), then pushed money into Montana through two branches: \$2 million to the Western Futures Fund (a Wyoming 501(c)(4) with no donor disclosure), and \$500,000 to Way Back PAC (also Wyoming-based). Western Futures Fund also fed \$150,000 to Way Back PAC, meaning both branches draw from the same upstream source. This pipeline has been active for at least two election cycles, with Western Futures Fund contributing \$100,000 to Montana Values Action Fund as far back as 2022.

Fireweed Campaigns Inc.

Fireweed Campaigns Inc. is a Helena-based political consulting firm registered at PO



Box 87, Helena, MT 59624 (MT SOS File No. D1414685). Its stated business purpose is "General Consulting Services for Campaigns and Organizations." Western Futures Fund's IRS Form 990 lists Fireweed as an independent contractor that received \$107,500 for "Project Management."

Who Runs Fireweed

Lauren Caldwell — President and Owner. Caldwell has served as Political Director of the Montana Federation of Public Employees (MFPE), where she works on campaigns from school mill levies to candidate elections and serves on MFPE's legislative lobby team. A March 2026 op-ed by Rep. Amy Regier (R-Kalispell), published in the Flathead Beacon and Whitefish Pilot, described Fireweed as "a firm run by the political director of the teachers union and former executive director of the Montana Democratic Party."

Kiah Abbey — Chief Operating Officer. Abbey has served as Board Treasurer of the Montana Abortion Access Program since 2014 (12 years). She is the former Montana Voices Program Director at the Western Organization

of Resource Councils (grassroots organizing) and former Secretary of the Missoula Tenants Union. She also operates Marigold Creative Strategies LLC and signed Fireweed's 2026 annual report.

Audrey McCue — Operations Manager. McCue served for years as the Elections Supervisor of Lewis and Clark County, overseeing all elections in the Helena area. In October 2020, the Lewis and Clark County Commission voted to accept \$215,000 from the Center for Tech and Civic Life (CTCL)—the nonprofit funded with \$350 million from Mark Zuckerberg. McCue's office was the direct recipient. She has since transitioned from administering elections to working for a political consulting firm funded through out-of-state dark money.

Caitie Butler — Communications Strategist. Butler's LinkedIn profile reveals she currently serves as Spokesperson & Communications for Montanans for Nonpartisan Courts (August 2025–present)—the committee that shares PO Box 87 with Fireweed and has paid Fireweed \$126,299 for management. Previously, she was Director of Communications for Montanans for Election Reform (January 2024–August 2025)—the ranked-choice voting initiative funded almost entirely by Unite America PAC (\$2.18 million) and managed by Fireweed (\$132,619 in retainers). Butler moved directly from one Fireweed-managed, out-of-state-funded committee to the next.

Fireweed's Progressive Committee Portfolio

Fireweed has been paid by a series of progressive ballot initiative campaigns and political committees, many funded by the same out-of-state network - see table 1.

These committees promoted ranked-choice voting, nonpartisan judicial elections, reproductive rights ballot measures, school levies, and labor-aligned causes. The same firm that managed these progressive campaigns is now running Republican primary candidates.

The Tutvedt PAC Web

Bruce Tutvedt, a former state legislator from Kalispell, sits at the center of an interlocking network of political committees. Montana Secretary of State filings (2025 annual report, File No. D1377218) show Tutvedt as President of Montanans for Election Reform Action Fund—the group that received \$2.18 million from Unite America PAC and paid Fireweed \$132,619. He is also a Director and Registered Agent of Big Sky Fiscal Guardians, and the largest individual Montana donor (\$25,000) to Conservatives4MT.

Three political committees—



Table 1

Committee	Paid to FW	Primary Funder
MT Election Reform Action Fund	\$132,619	Unite America PAC (\$2.18M)
MT for Nonpartisan Courts (shares PO Box 87)	\$126,299	GISWF-MT (\$100K), WFF (\$10K)
Montanans Decide	\$46,225	TBD
Yes! For Helena Schools	\$17,430	MT Values Action Fund (\$7K)
Forward Montana	\$6,525	—
MT State AFL-CIO	\$3,500	—



Table 2: Group A: Candidates With Fireweed Donations AND Paid Fireweed Services

Candidate (Office)	FW Staff \$	Way Back	Paid to FW	Purple Snow
Bedey, David* (SD 43)	\$1,880	\$470	\$10,567	\$1,514
Jones, Llew* (SD 9)	\$1,880	\$470	\$8,932	—
Binkley, Michele* (HD 85)	\$1,880	\$470	\$6,416	—
Walsh, Kenneth* (HD 69)	\$1,880	\$470	\$6,416	\$360
Reksten, Linda* (HD 13)	\$1,410	\$470	\$5,851	—
Barker, Brad (HD 55)	\$1,880	—	\$5,535	\$1,360
Cochran, Curtis* (HD 90)	\$1,880	\$470	\$3,761	—
Geise, Susan* (HD 17)	\$1,880	\$470	\$2,516	—
Nelson, Russell* (HD 67)	\$1,410	\$470	\$2,143	\$1,526
Fitzpatrick, John (HD 76)	\$940	—	\$2,129	—
TOTALS (10 candidates)	\$16,920	\$3,760	\$54,267	\$4,760

* = also received Way Back PAC contribution. Purple Snow Promotional (Billings) is associated with Hans Abbey, Kiah Abbey’s relative, who separately donated \$459 to Bedey.

Table 3: Group B: Candidates With Fireweed Donations Only

Candidate (Office)	FW Staff \$	Way Back
Albus, Eric (SD 14)	\$470	—
Buttrey, Ed (SD 11)	\$470	—
Martens, Doug (SD 18)	\$470	—
Moore, Valerie (HD 29)	\$940	—
Nikolakakos, George (SD 12)	\$940	—
Nikolakakos, Melissa (HD 20)	\$940	—
TOTALS (6 candidates)	\$4,230	—

Conservatives4MT, Big Sky Fiscal Guardians, and Treasure State Stewards—share identical infrastructure per COPP and SOS filings: the same Treasurer (Ross Fitzgerald), the same Deputy Treasurer (Roger Hagan), the same bank (First Interstate Bank), and overlapping Helena P.O. Boxes. Big Sky Fiscal Guardians and Treasure State Stewards were both registered on the same day (01/30/2026) with identical officers. Both filings were signed by Hagan.

Ted Kronebusch serves as a Director of both Montanans for Election Reform Action Fund (Tutvedt’s group) and Treasure State Stewards (one of the new PACs), directly linking the Unite America–funded election reform operation to the new PAC infrastructure. The registered agent email for Montanans for Election Reform is sean@treasurestatetax.com—sharing the “Treasure State” name with Treasure State Stewards.

Conservatives4MT spent approximately \$360,000 in the 2024 primary. Of its \$422,579 in total contributions, 78% (\$330,000) came from out-of-state committees: WPLN Action (\$100,000, funded by Pivotal Ventures/Melinda French Gates), Guarantee PAC (\$80,000, funded by Way Back PAC), Unite America PAC (\$75,000), and MHA PAC (\$75,000). Several candidates supported by Conservatives4MT expenditures in 2024 simultaneously received paid campaign



management from Fireweed. Llew Jones has a documented long relationship with Tutvedt.

The 2026 Republican Primary Operation

Montana COPP filings from January through March 2026 reveal a systematic pattern: Fireweed staff make coordinated maximum contributions (\$470 each) to a specific slate of Republican primary candidates, while Fireweed simultaneously provides those candidates with paid campaign management. Way Back PAC independently contributes to many of the same candidates.

Fireweed's standard billing includes a monthly campaign management fee (typically \$3,000) and compliance services (typically \$900). The largest Fireweed expenditures are from Bedey (\$10,567, including billboard placements), Jones (\$8,932, including a digital media buy), Binkley (\$6,416), and Walsh (\$6,416). Fireweed staff donated \$16,920 to these candidates while those candidates paid Fireweed \$54,267 for services—a 3:1 ratio in Fireweed's favor.

Across all sixteen candidates, Fireweed staff contributed \$21,150 in personal donations and Way Back PAC contributed \$3,760. All figures are Fireweed-specific, calculated from individual COPP filings.

Notable Connections

Susan Geise (HD 17) is the former Lewis and Clark County Commissioner who endorsed accepting the \$215,000 CTCL (Zuckerberg) grant in 2020—the grant administered by Audrey McCue. Geise is now receiving coordinated Fireweed staff donations, a Way Back PAC contribution, and paid Fireweed campaign services.

Michele Binkley (HD 85) was a Fireweed campaign management client in 2024 (\$8,004 for primary services). She is now running again and receiving coordinated donations from the same staff who managed her last

campaign.

Llew Jones (SD 9) has a long relationship with Tutvedt and is receiving the largest Fireweed-managed expenditures (\$8,932) of any candidate in the current cycle, plus Way Back PAC support.

The Convergence

The documented record establishes that a single integrated funding network—originating with the Arabella Advisors infrastructure and flowing through Wyoming intermediaries—simultaneously funds progressive ballot initiatives in Montana, pays a political consulting firm run by Democratic and union-aligned operatives to manage those initiatives, and then uses that same firm plus coordinated PAC contributions to support selected Republican primary candidates.

The candidates supported by this network have had outsized influence on issues aligned with the network's interests, including school funding and union priorities advanced by MFPE (where Fireweed's president has served as Political Director), and the defeat of partisan judicial selection legislation—directly benefiting Montanans for Nonpartisan Courts, the committee that shares Fireweed's mailing address and pays Fireweed \$17,000 per month.

The result is that out-of-state progressive dark money—originating with some of the wealthiest foundations in the country and laundered through a chain of intermediaries designed to obscure its origins—is being used to influence which Republicans Montana voters can choose from in their primary elections.

This article is limited to facts established by source records. It does not allege illegality or draw legal conclusions. All amounts and dates are as reported in the cited filings. Additional filings may expand this analysis.

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Here are the receipts, you decide who these candidates answer to.

Here is the report on Fireweed donating to Republican candidates, and some of those candidates hiring Fireweed. Seventeen Republican candidates received donations from Fireweed Campaigns. Eleven of those candidates hired Fireweed. Note the monthly fees associated with hiring them. There are two Abbeys listed as donors, Hans and Kiah. Hans is from Billings and runs Purple Snow Promotions, and Kiah is from Helena and works at Fireweed. They are family.

Connected to this donation stream is a board member of the Montana Free Press, Anne Avis. She donated to 11 of the candidates listed in the spreadsheet. (Barker, Bedey, Binkley, Cochran, Geise, Jones, Nikolakakos G and M, Reksten, Vance, Walsh). The Montana Free Press was listed in previous Montana Sentinel work. This stated fact does imply anything criminal, only that the candidates and funding streams that continue to appear in our research lead to dark money leftist sources, and voters deserve answers when wondering who these politicians answer to. The two articles below list the previous work that Fireweed employees have engaged in, including public-sector union work and county election clerk work. The third article is about ballot initiative funding and is written by Montanans for Limited Government.

(A) Name and title	(B) Average hours per week (list any hours for related organizations below dotted line)	(C) Position (do not check more than one box, unless person is both an officer and a director/trustee)					(D) Reportable compensation from the organization (W-2/1099-MISC/1099-NEC)	(E) Reportable compensation from related organizations (W-2/1099-MISC/1099-NEC)	(F) Estimated amount of other compensation from the organization and related organizations
		Individual trustee or director	Institutional Trustee;	Officer	Key employee	Highest compensated employee			
(1) JOHN ADAMS Executive Dir.	40.00 0.00			X			96,622	0	13,664
(2) MARK HUBER Treasurer	1.00 0.00	X		X			0	0	0
(3) HEATHER DIETRICK Director	1.00 0.00	X					0	0	0
(4) ANNE AVIS Director	1.00 0.00	X					0	0	0
(5) SUSAN FOX Director	1.00 0.00	X					0	0	0
(6) SKYLAR BROWNING President	1.00 0.00	X		X			0	0	0
(7) ALEXIS BONOGOFKY Secretary	1.00 0.00	X		X			0	0	0
(8) TRESA SMITH Director	1.00 0.00	X					0	0	0

Here is the latest IRS-900 showing Avis as a Montana Free Press board member.