



Accountable 

Leo's No Good, Very Bad 2023



INTRO

2023 was not exactly a banner year for conservative kingpin Leonard Leo. As he continued to push radical, unpopular policies, Leo's influence-peddling and self-enrichment finally caught up to him. After decades of manipulating American politics and the judiciary, Leo's in hot water — facing serious investigations and increased scrutiny for his efforts to remake America to match his own extreme agenda.

Leo is no longer able to quietly pull the strings from one of his multiple beach houses in Maine or while pouring wine for Supreme Court justices from his private locker at Morton's Steakhouse. He's learning what it means to be scrutinized — and when you've been pushing election lies, working to ban abortion, and drawing up extreme, anti-democratic plans for a future right-wing administration, you're bound to draw some ire. The constant stream of ethical and corruption scandals in 2023 interfered with Leo's ability to effectively and discretely implement his right-wing agenda.

Accountable.US has mapped out Leo's trials and tribulations in 2023. Read on further for a glimpse into what you can expect from Leo in 2024.

TIMELINE OF ACTIVITY

Supreme Court "billionaire matchmaker" Leonard Leo has spent decades working to force his radical, unpopular agenda on everyday Americans:

- **2008:** Leonard Leo helps [organize](#) a luxury Alaskan vacation with Justice Samuel Alito and Paul Singer, a right-wing megadonor whose hedge fund came before the court at least ten times in the years that followed.
- **2009:** Leonard Leo and Ginni Thomas [plot](#) with right-wing donors, including Harlan Crow, to exploit the Supreme Court's decision in Citizens United v. FEC, which was not released until January 2010. Leo helps Thomas establish Liberty Central, a tea party group working to block President Obama's agenda in the courts.
- **2011–2012:** Leonard Leo works with Kellyanne Conway's firm to route more than \$80,000 to Ginni Thomas through Liberty Consulting. Leo directed that the paperwork should have "[no mention of Ginni, of course.](#)"

- **2016:** Leonard Leo meets with then-candidate Donald Trump following the death of Justice Antonin Scalia. Leo was tasked with [drawing up a shortlist](#) of Supreme Court nominees, which included Trump's ultimate choice, Neil Gorsuch.
- **2017:** Leo leads the [confirmation battle](#) for Justice Gorsuch, with the Leo-linked Judicial Crisis Network spending more than \$10 million on Gorsuch's behalf after spending \$7 million to block Merrick Garland's nomination. Leo also worked to expand his influence within the Trump administration, helping finance the [multimillion-dollar sale](#) of Kellyanne Conway's firm.
- **2019:** After Trump released an updated SCOTUS shortlist [based on Leo's recommendations](#) including Brett Kavanaugh, Kavanaugh was nominated to replace Justice Anthony Kennedy. Leo sent \$4 million to Independent Women's Voice to dispute the credible sexual assault allegations against Kavanaugh.
- **2020:** After the death of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Leonard Leo's network pushed Trump and the Senate to quickly confirm a replacement, despite holding open a seat under similar circumstances just a few years prior. Leo's Judicial Crisis Network [pumped](#) \$10 million into the effort, and Amy Coney Barrett was confirmed just eight days before the 2020 election. Next, Leo's network shifted its focus to "election integrity," challenging critical election laws that made voting safe during the coronavirus pandemic.
- **2021:** Leo joined the board of a secretive social club called the Teneo Network, which ProPublica called "[a Federalist Society for everything](#)," part of a broader effort to impose an extreme agenda on Americans.
- **2021-2022:** Leo's network boosted radical Supreme Court challenges to voting rights and reproductive freedoms.
- **August 2023:** Washington, DC Attorney General Brian Schwalb [launched](#) an investigation into corrupt self-dealing in Leonard Leo's network. Leo quietly relocated his 85 Fund to Texas from the greater DC area.
- **October 2023:** The Leo-linked Concord Fund spent [more than \\$18 million](#) opposing Ohio's Issue 1, which enshrined the right to abortion in the state's constitution.

- **November 2023:** POLITICO revealed that Leo's [85 Fund](#) and other groups like [Americans for Public Trust](#) paid out millions more to Leo's for-profit companies than previously reported.
- **December 2023:** The Senate Judiciary Committee authorized subpoenas for Leonard Leo and Harlan Crow as part of an investigation of ethical lapses on the Supreme Court.

ISSUES

Abortion: Leonard Leo has devoted his life to abolishing abortion access. After handpicking Supreme Court justices, Leo got his wish in the Dobbs decision. And now, he's turning his attention to the states, attempting to chip away at a woman's right to choose anywhere and everywhere.

- The Leo-backed Donors Trust [pours money](#) into Alliance Defending Freedom, which filed a lawsuit attempting to ban the popular abortion pill mifepristone.
- Other Leo-linked groups like Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America and Students for Life of America [launched](#) campaigns attacking the FDA's decision allowing pharmacies to distribute the pill.
- Leo has [political and financial ties](#) to Judge Matthew Kacsmaryk, who issued the first [ruling](#) banning the abortion pill.
- Leo's Concord Fund bankrolled the [unsuccessful attempt to limit abortion access](#) through an Ohio ballot initiative this November.

Democracy: *If you thought the embarrassing defeat of Big Lie candidates in 2022 taught Leo a lesson, think again. Leo continues to back anti-democratic judges, supports cases meant to erode our democracy, and works to take away power from the American people.*

- Voting Rights
 - Two [Leo-backed eighth circuit judges](#) issued a ruling to undermine the landmark Voting Rights Act by eliminating the public's ability to sue to try to enforce key provisions of the law.
 - Capitalizing on his decades-long attempt to remake the federal judiciary, Leo [teed up a challenge](#) to Alabama's redistricting case in an effort to disenfranchise minority voters and further gut the Voting Rights Act.

- Leo's network [propped up](#) House Republicans' signature election reform bill which would suppress votes and reduce confidence in American elections. His cronies served as key advocates for the legislation.
- RAGA
 - The Republican Attorneys General Association continues to count Leonard Leo as its number one champion —Leo was exposed as the [group's top financial backer](#) in 2023.
 - RAGA is essential in Leo's scheme to remake America. These extreme attorneys general file suits on the issues Leo prioritizes in the courts that Leo also manipulates.

Anti-ESG/Environment: Leo and his cronies found their new pet issue: rooting out so-called "wokeism."

- Consumers' Research, the central hub for the right-wing anti-woke campaign in 2023, [received \\$6 million](#) from Leo's Donors Trust. Leo serves as mentor, good friend, and primary financial backer to Consumers' Research executive director Will Hild.
- In a rare interview, Leo focused on [attacking companies](#) for setting policies he sees as too "woke." Unsurprisingly, the corporations he singled out closely mirrored the targets of his Consumers' Research campaign.

Financial/Tax Reform: This year, reporting revealed Leo's decades-long campaign to upend financial regulations. Now that his chosen Supreme Court justices are in power, he's reigniting this battle and taking his long-held ire towards consumer protections to the judiciary.

- Leo's pals [lead the Conservative Enterprise Institute](#), the group behind the Supreme Court case Moore v. US – which could result in a giant tax loophole and subsequent financial windfall for corporations and billionaires.
- Citing research from Accountable.US, ProPublica [revealed](#) Leo's scheme to influence key policymakers to eliminate key safeguards put in place following the 2008 financial crisis.
- Leonard Leo's dark money network is working to [defund the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau](#) by backing a challenge of its authority in the Supreme Court case Consumer Financial Protection Bureau v. Community Financial Services Association of America.

Future of Conservative Movement: Leo is always looking to the future. He's constantly scheming to remake America in line with his extreme conservative vision. From the Teneo Network to Project 2025, Leo's fingerprints are sure to be all over the future of the right-wing movement.

- Leo continued his tenure as the [chairman of the Teneo Network](#) – a secretive [ecosystem](#) of right-wing politicians, activists, and donors creating a pipeline for conservative influence throughout American society.
- A new conservative campaign to attack the “deep state,” Project 2025, received funding from [Leo-backed organizations](#) and offers startling insight into the goals of right-wing power brokers for a future Republican administration.

SELF-ENRICHMENT

Leonard Leo has spent decades working to appoint activist judges to the bench and impose a radical social agenda on Americans. But more recently, media reports and investigations make clear that Leo is in it for more than his own ideology. Leo's nonprofit network reportedly paid out more than \$73 million to his for-profit firm CRC Advisors, sparking an investigation by DC Attorney General Brian Schwalb.

But Leo isn't slowing down in the face of increasing scrutiny. New tax filings uncovered by Accountable.US revealed a host of nonprofits spending questionable amounts of money on Leo's “consulting services,” including the 85 Fund, which paid out \$21 million to CRC Advisors in 2022 alone.

Investigative reports from POLITICO and ProPublica also spotlighted Leo's rapid wealth gain during the Trump era, and his high-rolling trips and luxury vacations with Supreme Court justices.

LEONARD LEO ENRICHES HIMSELF THROUGH CIRCULAR PAYMENT STRUCTURE BETWEEN HIS NONPROFIT AND FOR-PROFIT GROUPS

By avoiding taxes and dodging disclosure requirements, Leonard Leo is running millions of dollars through his enterprise of nonprofits to enrich himself and his associates. Revelations of Leo's self-dealing have his nonprofit network on the run: he's refusing to cooperate with a DC AG probe, recently moved his 85 Fund to Texas, and shuttered his BH Fund, a hub for unexplained payments to close allies.

- Leo has held leadership roles and personal financial interests in two for-profit firms: [CRC Advisors](#) and a now-defunct holding company called the [BH Group](#).
- [POLITICO](#) reported that since just 2016, nonprofit organizations connected to Leonard Leo poured \$43 million into CRC Advisors and paid out an additional \$15 million to the BH Group, totaling more than \$58 million.
- Following the story, watchdog Campaign for Accountability [filed an IRS complaint](#) finding that his nonprofits have paid his for-profits more than \$73 million since 2016.
- The complaint alleges that six Leo-linked nonprofits "pay him indirectly or directly" and finds evidence that Leo's consulting firms may not have provided equivalent services for the million-dollar payments.
- Campaign finance law experts [told](#) POLITICO that these transactions could represent an abuse of federal tax law as the payments to Leo's consulting firms appear extraordinarily high for intangible goods or services.
- The BH Group was dissolved just three days after POLITICO [inquired](#) about its role in facilitating the multi-million-dollar sale of Kellyanne Conway's polling company.
- Following the DC Attorney General's confirmation of a probe into Leo's network over these payments, Leo moved the 85 Fund from the greater DC area to Texas.
- Leo confirmed to POLITICO that he would not be cooperating with the DC AG's investigation.

LEO-FUNDED NONPROFITS REPORTED PAYMENTS TO CRC ADVISORS IN 2022

According to tax filings obtained by Accountable.US, numerous Leo-funded nonprofits reported paying millions of dollars back into his for-profit consulting firm, CRC Advisors. These include:

- **The 85 Fund**, formerly known as the Judicial Education Project, reported a payment of more than [\\$21 million](#) to CRC Advisors in 2022.
- **The Federalist Society**, where Leo serves as co-chairman, reported paying out \$1.5 million to CRC Advisors in 2022.
- **Consumers' Research**, an anti-ESG group, which reported paying [\\$600,000](#) to CRC for legal services.
- **Americans for Public Trust**, which reported paying out nearly [\\$500,000](#) to CRC, nearly one-third of its revenue.

LEO UPGRADED HIS LIFESTYLE WHILE NONPROFITS PAID FOR HIS FOR-PROFIT BUSINESS TENS OF MILLIONS OF DOLLARS

Leonard Leo has led an increasingly lavish lifestyle, corresponding with his growing political influence.

- [POLITICO](#) found that Leo needed a fixed-rate loan from the FHA to purchase his first house in 2010.
- Despite his humble beginnings, Leo paid off his mortgage for his first house in 2018, bought a second home in the affluent seaside village of Mount Desert, Maine that same year, paid off his mortgage for the 11-bedroom Maine mansion by 2019, and later bought yet another million dollar home in Mount Desert from the heir to the Mellon fortune.
- Leo also developed a taste for the finer things in life. His new neighborhood in Maine is a haven for "barons like the Rockefellers and Morgans." Leo acquired a wine locker at DC's Morton's Steakhouse and hired the chief steward at the Trump International Hotel as his wine buyer. He [often wears](#) a pocket watch on a gold chain as an accessory to his tailored suits.

LEO'S SELF-ENRICHMENT EXTENDS TO CLOSE ALLIES, FEDERALIST SOCIETY STAFFERS

Leo's close associates also rake in money from Leo's network, even while officially on the Federalist Society payroll, including:

- CRC Advisors' Jonathan Bunch, who [received \\$1.54 million](#) from the Rule of Law Trust while claiming to work full time at the Federalist Society.
- Leo's close friend Ronald Cass, whose consulting firm [received \\$2.9 million](#) from the 85 Fund despite scant evidence of provided services.
- Maria Marshall, who [received \\$775,000](#) from the Rule of Law Trust while holding an official role with the Federalist Society.
- Marshall's husband, Alex, who takes home [an eye-popping salary of \\$764,000](#) as Chief Information Officer for the Marble Freedom Trust.

EVEN SUPREME COURT JUSTICES ARE TAKING A CUT...

Stunning investigative reports revealed rampant corruption pervading the Supreme Court, often with Leo's help:

- According to [The Washington Post](#), Leo routed payments to Justice Clarence Thomas' wife Ginni through Kellyanne Conway's polling company.
- [ProPublica](#) revealed that Leo organized a swanky Alaskan vacation for Justice Samuel Alito with megadonor Paul Singer — who had business before the court.
- Further reporting from ProPublica uncovered Leo's role in fostering longstanding relationships between Justice Clarence Thomas and billionaire Federalist Society donors, including [Harlan Crow](#) and [the Koch brothers](#).

LOOKING AHEAD

As Leo continues to funnel money from his billion-dollar slush fund (also known as Marble Freedom Trust), Americans' rights are stripped away as Leo works to undermine their freedoms.

From his [campaign](#) to block abortion pill access, to his nonprofit network's [funding](#) of efforts to roll back child labor laws on the state level, and the launch of a campaign to [undermine](#) responsible investing, Leo's network appears to be doubling down on his extreme, far-right agenda.

Leo's fingerprints are also all over a series of cases before the Supreme Court in the coming year. Most notably, Leo is closely connected to the groups supporting Moore v. US, a tax case called a potential "billionaire bailout." But Leo's connections to the case don't end there. An [Accountable.US review](#) found that Leo's personal lawyer, David Rivkin, is arguing the case, and Leo is tied to the billionaires who stand to benefit, like Paul Singer — all of whom have relationships with Justice Samuel Alito.

And with the 2024 election approaching, Leo's exerting more influence than ever before. His network is working to [block abortion access, funding and executing](#) efforts to roll back voting rights, [bankrolling initiatives](#) to ensure the next Republican administration is far-right and extreme, pushing [voter suppression legislation](#) on Capitol Hill, and advocating for [dangerous legal theories](#) to change how our elections operate.

As Leo continues to distribute hundreds of millions of dollars through his network in the new year, Accountable.US will continue to expose the money, corruption, and extremism at the heart of his influence.