

WE THE PEOPLE

PROJECT ON GOVERNMENT OVERSIGHT
ANNUAL REPORT 2020



Small Business
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AGENCY OVERSIGHT

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Director's Note

Dear Friend,

I think it's safe to say that 2020 was one of the most challenging years our country has seen in a while.

Early last year, the deadly coronavirus hit our nation, exposing the extent to which our government is unprepared to manage crises. That spring, the horrific murders of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd sparked protests across the country, as well as demands for police accountability and a just system of government that addresses racism and white supremacy. Then, we witnessed the efforts by a sitting president and his supporters to undermine the election, culminating in a violent insurrection, and demonstrating how fragile our democracy truly is.


Our democracy survived those crises, but we may not be so lucky next time. We have so much work to do.

The Project On Government Oversight turned to face the challenges each of these crises presented. One of our priorities in 2020 was to combat systemic racism. To do this, POGO began working to more explicitly show how corruption and abuse of power disproportionately impact historically marginalized people, including and not limited to, Black, Indigenous, disabled, migrant, low-income individuals, and other marginalized identities.

Ensuring accountability in the government's response to the coronavirus pandemic also turned into a major POGO priority. The scale and impact of the crisis necessitated massive federal spending, and the government's response needed external oversight to ensure that resources went where they were supposed to and that officials were held accountable when they didn't. POGO launched an independent tracking website to help the public keep an eye on COVID-19 spending, and to bring context to that data to see if the government really succeeded in helping Main Street businesses and communities in need.

POGO also worked with policymakers to build accountability mechanisms into coronavirus relief efforts to ensure watchdogs were empowered to address inevitable wrongdoing. We followed up on that work by investigating potential fraud and corruption. For instance, one of our investigations revealed that a wealthy Ukrainian oligarch received tens of millions of dollars in pandemic relief loans for his coal mining operations in the U.S. despite owing millions in fines for violating health and safety laws. This and other POGO investigations highlighted mismanagement and the potential for corruption in the federal COVID-19 response.

Our democracy survived those crises, but we may not be so lucky next time.



Finally, one of POGO's priorities near the end of the year was to address the transition of power after the 2020 election. The aftermath of the election was dismaying, but not surprising. In the weeks that followed the election, POGO worked hard to ensure the new administration would have the tools necessary to govern effectively.

These were only some of the many unforeseen challenges last year. We are so thankful for your support, which enabled POGO to rise to meet them.

None of the crises of 2020 happened in a vacuum; longstanding systemic weaknesses in our democratic institutions allowed them to happen. POGO is working to enact good governance reforms that will help correct inequities, and build better institutions that serve us, the people of this country. **We must rebuild our democracy, and ensure it is equitable, inclusive, and more resilient in the face of challenges as it never has truly been before.**

This year had another challenge for POGO: our beloved Chair of the Board of Directors for the past 25 years, David Hunter stepped down. Hunter's extraordinary dedication to POGO's mission and staff have been crucial to the organization's success. We are so grateful that he will remain on the Board to help steer our ship, and that Nithi Vivatrat is taking over as our new Board Chair. With this team, and with the backing of our supporters like you, I am so excited for the change we can make.

Sincerely,

Danielle Brian
Executive Director



The background is a vibrant teal color. In the upper right, a portion of a US \$100 bill is visible, showing the number '100' and the text 'FEDERAL RESERVE NOTE' and 'KB 46665755 E B2'. Below this, a blue paint splatter is centered. In the lower right, a thick, horizontal brown brushstroke is applied. At the bottom, another portion of a US \$100 bill is visible, showing the number '100' and the text 'THIS NOTE IS LEGAL TENDER FOR ALL DEBTS, PUBLIC AND PRIVATE' and 'Catherine L. Sabal Treasurer of the United States'.

Exposing Corruption and Abuse of Power, Demanding Accountability



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Introduction



ABOUT US

The Project On Government Oversight was founded in 1981 as a small organization whose mission was to expose waste and abuse in the defense budget. Since then, POGO has expanded its mission to investigate waste, corruption, and abuse of power across the federal government.

HOW WE WORK

POGO is fighting for a fair and just federal government that works for the people, not just for those who have the money and connections to shape public policy for their own private gain. We have earned a reputation as a nonpartisan, honest broker that makes us a trusted resource among government insiders and decision-makers from both sides of the aisle, enabling us to work toward solutions to the problems facing our nation's democracy.

Our investigations team uncovers systemic issues of wrongdoing in the federal government.

Our public policy team explores and pushes for evidence-based policy reforms that address systemic issues in our government.

Our civic engagement team works to connect with new and existing supporters, stakeholders, and partners “beyond the beltway” to engage more people with POGO’s mission.

Our research team does deep dives into data and other materials to inform our investigations and products, such as POGO’s COVID-19 relief spending tracker.

While these efforts address corruption and abuse of power in all three branches of the federal government, we also have three projects that drive good governance in specific areas:

- **The Center for Defense Information (CDI)** aims to secure a far more effective military at a significantly lower cost.
- **The Congressional Oversight Initiative (COI)** provides congressional staff with resources and knowledge to perform their oversight responsibilities more effectively in order to strengthen the legislative branch’s ability to counterbalance executive power.
- **The Constitution Project (TCP)** safeguards constitutional rights that are threatened by abuse of the government’s national security and domestic policing powers.

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instagram.com/pogowatchdog



youtube.com/pogowatchdog

2020 By The Numbers



111

Congressional Mentions

Congress cited our expertise 111 times in Dear Colleague letters, floor mentions, reports, tweets, and press releases. See some of these citations on [page 8](#) and [10](#).



9

Testimonies

POGO provided testimony to Congress nine times this year on issues like COVID-19 spending accountability, and limits on facial recognition technology. One of these testimonies is highlighted on [page 17](#).



↑267%

Actions Taken by supporters

POGO's supporters increased the number of actions they took this year, like writing letters to Senators or submitting letters to the editor by 267% over 2019. See some of these actions on [page 24](#).

CNN

The Washington Post

36

Op-Eds placed

POGO had 36 opinion editorials placed in news outlets like CNN, The Washington Post, and USA Today. To see a topic we published an op-ed on, see [page 13](#).



8

Virtual Town Halls held

700 people attended a virtual Town Hall event to learn more about POGO's work this year. See how a town hall resulted in a bill being introduced in Congress on [page 24](#).



\$1.6T

Amount of COVID-19 spending our tracker includes

POGO's COVID-19 relief spending tracker incorporates \$1.6 Trillion in federal spending. See more on [page 18](#).

Strengthening Government Ethics

POGO has spent decades fighting for stronger government ethics rules, which are critical to ensuring our government officials are using their positions to benefit the people rather than their own personal financial or political interests.

Ensuring Future Administrations Have Strong Ethics Plans

In February 2020, Congress passed the Presidential Transition Enhancement Act on a bipartisan vote. The legislation requires presidential transition teams to develop and release an ethics plan before an election that lists lobbying work and conflicts of interest for any members of the transition team, and establishes a code of ethics that each member must agree to.

POGO worked with the original sponsors to craft the legislation, and with members of Congress to get the bill passed along bipartisan lines.


The Biden transition team was the first to be subject to the law, and they **consulted with POGO staff in writing their ethics code.** In January 2021, President Joe Biden released an ethics executive order that closely mirrored the transition team plan, focusing on key goals of rebuilding public trust in government, making merit-based decisions, and avoiding any appearance of conflicts of interest when administration appointees leave public service. While it could have done more, it is the strongest ethics executive order to ever be issued.

Reducing Financial Conflicts of Interest

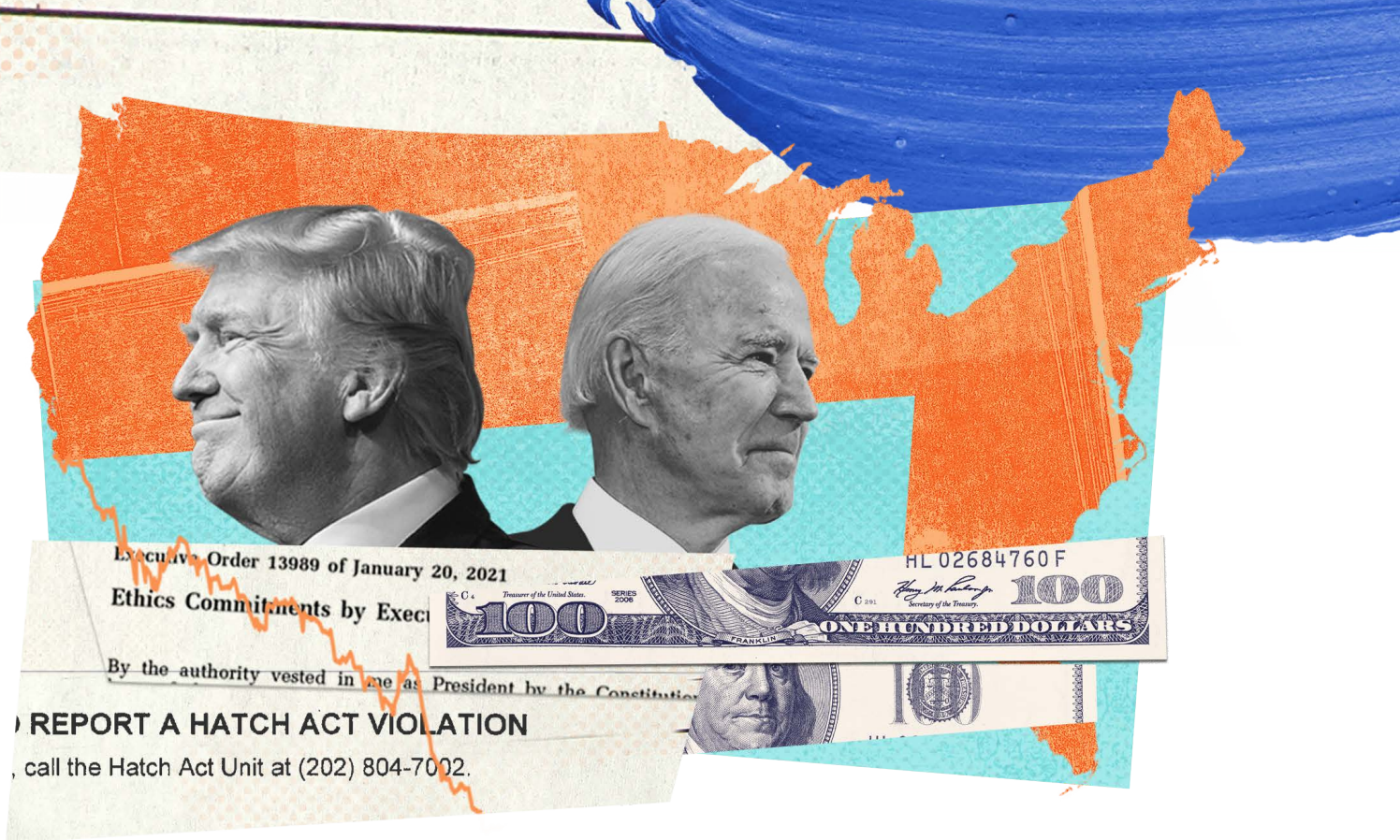
In 2012, POGO was instrumental in helping get the STOCK Act passed, which prohibits members of Congress and congressional staff from using non-public information for personal and private gain. That legislation was in the news again in 2020 when four senators sold stocks in January after having been privately briefed about the novel coronavirus; by late February, the stocks plummeted in value as it became clear the virus was going to cause a public health and economic crisis. While none of the four senators were ultimately charged with anything related to these stock

sales, the issue highlighted the need to strengthen ethics rules to prevent elected officials from engaging in self-serving financial transactions.

POGO also worked with members of Congress who introduced the TRUST in Congress Act, which would require members to put their financial assets into a blind trust while in office. **POGO was cited in the congressional press release announcing the introduction of the bill.** We will continue to build bipartisan support for the legislation throughout 2021.



POGO's whistleblower guide, *Caught Between Conscience and Career*, is cited in a list of resources created by the House Whistleblower Ombudsman office, which provides training and guidelines for House offices that communicate with whistleblowers.



Tracking Attorney General Bill Barr's Misconduct

In September 2020, POGO published a detailed timeline documenting then-Attorney General Bill Barr's actions while in office, and we updated it throughout the year.

We identified a long string of misconduct that could cause lasting damage to the Justice Department and the rule of law.

The timeline illustrates how Barr's actions formed a pattern undermining the Justice Department's proper role in the executive branch, and set dangerous precedents stymying congressional oversight of the department. We chronicled how Barr interfered with impartial prosecutions, prioritized politics over justice, undermined the independent special counsel's investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 election, and intentionally hindered congressional oversight.

POGO consulted with writers and researchers from *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver* in the creation of their segment featuring Barr's misconduct while in office,

which aired on November 1, 2020, and **Jake Laperruque, senior counsel at The Constitution Project at POGO, received a special thanks in the credits of that episode.**

Additionally, Representative Jackie Speier (D-CA) wrote a measure to censure Barr that drew from our timeline in its selection of misconduct to highlight. Barr ultimately resigned before the censure measure could be introduced.



Last Week Tonight did a deep dive segment on then-AG Bill Barr.

Preserving Legitimacy of the Courts

The United States court system exists to protect our rights and ensure our justice system is fair. However, the public's faith in the judiciary as an independent mediator has been declining, and contentious political battles over judicial appointments have marred the legitimacy of the institution. Reform is needed to rebuild a strong, functioning courts system.

Improving Judicial Transparency and Accountability

Despite being the branch of government charged with reviewing and interpreting our nation's laws, the judiciary system needs to improve its own transparency and accountability.

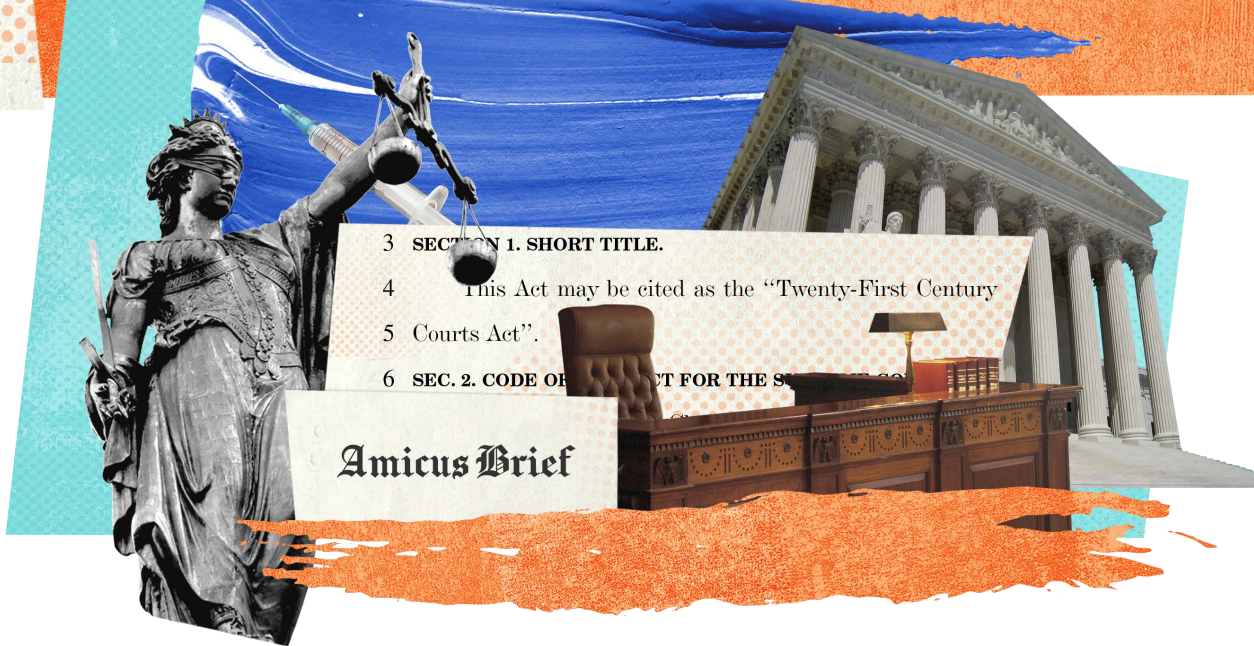
POGO worked with lawmakers on a series of judicial branch reforms that improve court transparency and accountability by establishing a code of conduct for judges, and requiring judges to make their recusal decisions public. **The 21st Century Courts Act was introduced in the House in March 2020, citing POGO as a major supporter.** We will continue to work with lawmakers to move this bill toward passage.

Additionally, in December 2020, the House passed with broad bipartisan support the Open Courts Act of 2020, **which included POGO's recommendation to make the Public Access to Court Electronic Records (PACER) system free to the public.** Despite the fact that the system is fully funded by tax dollars, the federal courts still charge a fee for individuals to access the information in the system. Making the system free to the public would open a window into what the courts are doing. A bipartisan Senate companion bill was introduced by Senators Ron Wyden (D-OR) and Rob Portman (R-OH), and POGO will continue to build bipartisan support in the Senate to pass this important transparency law.

Restoring Public Faith in the Federal Judiciary

The federal courts wield an enormous amount of power in our political system. They have the power to strike down laws passed by Congress, overturn the decisions of presidents, and affect the outcomes of elections. In light of this, the task of appointing judges has turned into partisan warfare, and spending by interest groups to influence judicial selections has exploded. The result is the dangerous decline of the court system's independence and institutional legitimacy.

In 2020, POGO organized a Task Force on Federal Judicial Selection to take stock of the federal judicial selection process and to propose practical recommendations to fix it. The experts on the task force worked throughout the year to research and write recommendations that will help restore the legitimacy of the judicial selection process, and of the courts themselves. The Task Force will publish a report in 2021 that will help guide the discussion on reforming the courts.



Fighting Against Unjust Death Sentences

The Constitution Project has been fighting unjust death penalties for two decades, and continued that work when they joined POGO in 2017. This work is motivated by a profound concern that the U.S. system of capital punishment is deeply flawed: It is steeped in racism, and prone to wrongful convictions.

POGO contributed to reversals on three unconstitutional state death penalty cases in 2020.

The first case involved death row inmate Bobby Moore, a person with an intellectual disability, who had been sentenced to death in 1980 for killing a store clerk. The Constitution Project organized allies to file an amicus brief on the case, making the argument that Moore was ineligible for the death penalty because of his disability. The U.S. Supreme Court cited our amicus brief in rebuking the Texas courts, and Moore’s death penalty sentence was reduced to life in prison in 2019. In June 2020, Moore was granted parole. The Texas Court of Criminal Appeals has reversed nine additional death sentences based on the precedent we helped set with Moore’s case.

In the second case, the U.S. Supreme Court reversed the death sentence of Terence Andrus. In 2019, POGO organized a group of former prosecutors to petition the court for a writ of certiorari—a court process to review the decision of a lower court—because

Andrus’s lawyer failed to bring forward evidence that may have convinced the jury that the death penalty wasn’t appropriate. In June 2020, the Supreme Court sent the case back to the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals for review, holding that Andrus’s lawyer’s performance was “constitutionally deficient.”



The Texas Court of Criminal Appeals has reversed nine additional death sentences based on the precedent we helped set with Moore’s case.

In the last case, **POGO proved instrumental in supporting the appeal of Johnny Lee Gates** in the Georgia Supreme Court. In 2018, POGO organized an amicus brief arguing that prosecutors engaged in systematic racial discrimination in jury selection against Gates, who is Black, and that the state had hidden jury selection notes that revealed discriminatory intent. In March 2020, Gates won his appeal when DNA evidence made it clear he was innocent. His lawyer told POGO that our amicus brief was a critical turning point in the case. In May, Gates was released as a free man after 43 years in prison.

Reckoning on Racial Injustice

For many people, the 2020 murders of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd brought to the forefront the grim reality of the unlawful killing of so many people of color by law enforcement in this country, and protests condemning the systemic oppression of those communities swept the nation.

Keeping an Eye on Government Surveillance

In May 2020, **POGO National Security Investigator Jason Paladino broke news** in a series of tweets that U.S. Customs and Border Protection deployed a Predator drone to fly over protesters in Minneapolis to conduct surveillance, seemingly undermining the public's First Amendment rights to protest. His tweets were picked up by CNN, Fox News, and the *New York Times*.

POGO's reporting of the drone spurred an investigation by the House Committee on Oversight and Reform. The committee cited POGO's work in a letter to the Department of Homeland Security that described the drone's deployment as "a gross abuse of authority."

Protecting Civil Liberties While Protesting

The act of protesting in the United States dates back to its founding—and it's your constitutional right. However, during times of fear, the government often tries to justify its expansion of surveillance in the name of "security." 2020 was no exception.

One of the most significant risks protesters face are cell phone tracking devices, known as stingrays, that imitate cell phone towers in order to capture a phone's signals. POGO has advocated for a consistent rule requiring

law enforcement to obtain a warrant before conducting any cell phone tracking. In June 2020, Representatives Ted Lieu (D-CA) and Anna Eshoo (D-CA), and Senator Ron Wyden (D-OR), **wrote a letter based on POGO's work to the Department of Justice** asking for information about how the department was using stingrays during protests, and whether the department had applied for warrants to use the data. POGO will continue to work with congressional offices to build effective guardrails on this technology.

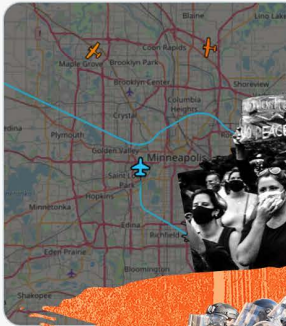
Pausing Police Use of Amazon's Facial Recognition

In March 2020, **Jake Laperruque submitted testimony** to the House Committee on Appropriations' Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies about the need to limit funding for law enforcement to purchase facial recognition technology, **noting that this technology often misidentifies women and people of color.** After law enforcement faced a

wave of public criticism for using facial recognition on protestors, Amazon announced in June a one-year ban on law enforcement use of its facial recognition software, "Rekognition." Microsoft and IBM declared similar measures. This moratorium is a reflection of the growing concern about the abuse of this technology and the need to limit its use in law enforcement activities.



Jason Paladino @jason_paladino · May 29, 2020
 NOW: @CBP Predator Drone #CPB104 circling over Minneapolis at 20K feet. Took off from Grand Forks Air Force Base. #Minneapolisprotests #surveillance #planespotting



Ending Police Militarization

Militarized police were a regular presence at protests in 2020. As the United States continued to confront the systemic racism and instances of police brutality that ignited public protest, POGO renewed our focus on the 1033 Program, which transfers surplus military equipment from the Pentagon to state and local law enforcement agencies.

The 1033 Program first received national attention in 2014 following the shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. **POGO's analysis in 2020 by Sarah Turberville and Senior Investigative Advisor Wayne McElrath detailed how law enforcement's possession of military equipment correlated with increased police violence.** The piece included several recommendations to reduce the flow of military equipment to police.

POGO also published an op-ed in *USA Today*, co-authored by Director of the Center for Defense Information Mandy Smithberger

and Wayne McElrath arguing that we can no longer stand to have combat-ready police officers face off against unarmed protestors as though they are enemies.

In July 2020, we organized a sign-on letter of former law enforcement officials **supporting provisions that would increase oversight and place stronger limits on the program.** While Congress has passed some of the provisions, they must go further to prevent military equipment from being funneled to law enforcement. We know militarized police forces are often more likely to be deployed and to use excessive force against Black, Indigenous, and Latino/a people. It is critical that we take steps to address the deep roots of racism that have long plagued our country.

In 2020, POGO's Congressional Oversight Initiative held two trainings for congressional staff on effective oversight of federal, state, and local law enforcement.



Fighting for a More Effective Defense Budget



Every year, Congress passes a budget package that determines funding for the Department of Defense and that sets defense policies. POGO fights to make sure this legislation serves the best interests of the U.S. public, the servicemembers who defend us, and national security.

Making Inroads Toward a 10% Cut

COVID-19 brought into stark relief the fact that our budget priorities left our nation unprepared for protecting public safety. POGO has long been a leader in the conversation about the need to cut the Pentagon budget, and in 2020 **led a campaign that resulted in advocates sending 3,684 letters to**

their senators calling for a 10% cut in the defense budget. Although in the end the amendment was not brought up for a vote, this is the first time in years that the Senate has held a real debate about a significant cut to Pentagon spending.

Preserving Revolving Door Restrictions

In 2020, POGO led a coalition of organizations working to defeat a Pentagon proposal in the defense budget that would have weakened restrictions on senior Pentagon officials becoming lobbyists. The practice of officials leaving the federal government to go work for the contractors they had been responsible for overseeing, known as the revolving door,

creates the appearance of undue industry influence on policymaking, and contributes to overspending. **POGO and its allies organized a sign-on letter, and mobilized 1,600 supporters to send letters to their senators to oppose the rollback.** As a result of public pressure, this important check on the revolving door will remain in place.

Pushing for Landmark Transparency Laws

Included in the defense policy bill passed in 2020 are two critical **transparency laws POGO has long advocated for: the Corporate Transparency Act and “Section 885.”** The Corporate Transparency Act requires private companies to report their “beneficial owners”—the people who really control and benefit from the company—and includes new whistleblower protections to encourage individuals to report wrongdoing. Section 885 of the defense bill requires all companies receiving federal contracts or

grants over \$500,000 to publicly disclose their beneficial owners.

These two transparency laws are a huge win for the U.S. public. Investigations have routinely found that companies with anonymous ownership can be facilitators of corruption, misconduct, and crimes such as money laundering and terrorism financing. The laws will help protect taxpayer money and strengthen our national security.

Battling Pandemic Profiteers

The coronavirus pandemic has made it clear that our current national security spending priorities aren't protecting us from real threats. The COVID-19 death toll in the U.S. has now surpassed the number of combat deaths in World War II, Korea, and Vietnam combined. Still, the Pentagon spends hundreds of millions of dollars on military equipment instead of building up the country's supply of medical equipment.

Calling for Congress to Investigate

In September, the *Washington Post* revealed that the Pentagon spent hundreds of millions of dollars that Congress had given the department to build up the nation's supply of COVID-19-related medical equipment on unrelated items instead, including dress uniforms, body armor, and jet engine parts. Meanwhile, shortages of medical supplies persisted. As a result, healthcare workers were forced to reuse their N95 masks for weeks at a time until they were falling apart, and virus testing efforts were hampered by nasal swab shortages.

The Pentagon seemed to prioritize funneling the money that had been appropriated for combatting the virus to its contractors instead, to build up an inventory of equipment that had little or nothing to do with the crisis

the country was in. Multiple large defense contractors received money from the fund meant for medical equipment, as well as from the Paycheck Protection Program meant to help small businesses survive the crisis.

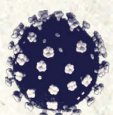
POGO co-authored a letter signed by dozens of civil society groups urging the House Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis to investigate the inappropriate use of these funds. Following the letter, several House committee chairs launched an investigation into the Pentagon's spending decisions, and the Department of Defense inspector general opened an additional independent investigation into the Pentagon's use of the funds shortly thereafter, which is still ongoing.

Pushing Back on Bailing out Boeing

In March 2020, Boeing requested *\$60 billion* from Congress to help them during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is an eyebrow-raising request under any circumstances but is particularly hard to swallow given that there was evidence the company had mismanaged its 737 Max program resulting in

plane crashes that killed 346 people over the previous two years. **POGO spoke out**, arguing that the U.S. public shouldn't be bailing out a company that hadn't prioritized protecting public safety. **In May 2020, the company announced it would not be pursuing COVID-19 relief funding.**

100 Days of COVID-19



1 January 3rd
The head of the CDC informs the Health and Human Services Department about the outbreak in China.

27 January 29th
President Trump announces a COVID-19 Task Force.

Fighting for Better COVID-19 Relief

In March 2020, as the coronavirus hit the country hard, many businesses were forced to close or reduce capacity, resulting in massive layoffs around the nation. The economy seemed to be in free fall. In response, Congress passed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act committing \$2.2 trillion to help businesses and people stay afloat.

Writing Accountability Measures into COVID-19 Relief

While Congress was drafting the coronavirus relief bill, **POGO worked closely with lawmakers to ensure they included oversight provisions that would help the public keep a watchful eye on how the money was spent.** With our help, Congress included provisions in the act that created the Pandemic Response Accountability Committee, which is empowered to collect and share data, and to coordinate audits that evaluate the spending and ferret out wrongdoing.

The act also created a new special inspector general for pandemic recovery within the Treasury Department who can investigate waste, fraud, and abuse in the spending programs. We heard from insiders on both sides of the aisle that **those safeguards would not have been included had it not been for POGO's work on the issue.**

Ensuring Paycheck Protection Program Transparency

One of the largest programs established under the coronavirus relief bill was the Paycheck Protection Program, designed to give loans that would be eligible for forgiveness to small businesses in need. Despite the fact that the act required the federal government to release data about the loan program, then-Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin announced in June that the Small Business Administration wouldn't publish any data on loan recipients.

Administration to force disclosure of the data, and worked with decision-makers on both sides of the aisle to ensure the data was released. Treasury and the Small Business Administration ultimately reversed the decision, thereby paving the way for loan information to be made public. Having access to all legally required data on the Paycheck Protection Program loans aids watchdogs in rooting out waste, fraud, and abuse in the program.

POGO publicly condemned the announcement, sued the Small Business

34 February 5th
The CDC starts shipping coronavirus test kits.

41 February 12th
The CDC announces the test kits it shipped are unreliable.



Danielle Brian testifies before Congress on July 28th, 2020.

Testifying for Improved COVID-19 Oversight

In July 2020, **POGO Executive Director Danielle Brian** was invited to testify by **Senator Ron Johnson (R-WI)** before the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee on the oversight of COVID-19 relief spending. Danielle testified that the oversight mechanisms and data reporting included in the coronavirus relief bill were necessary but not sufficient to ensure that future spending would go to those most in need, especially communities of color, and therefore may not effectively stabilize the economy and help those most impacted by the pandemic.

She made a series of recommendations including expanding the powers of the special inspector general for pandemic recovery, collecting and sharing reports from loan recipients on how they used the funds

they received, and directing the Treasury Department to prioritize traditionally underserved markets including Black- and women-owned businesses and businesses in rural communities. These reforms would help Congress evaluate how the coronavirus relief bill was implemented, help the public understand whether the government’s efforts were successful in rescuing the economy, and ensure aid went to communities that were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

POGO’s Congressional Oversight Initiative provided two COVID-19 virtual training sessions in 2020 to congressional staff on the reporting requirements of the coronavirus relief bill, and on specific databases, trackers, and other tools that could help Congress follow the money.

51 February 22nd
The CDC advises state officials to limit testing.

61 March 3rd
The World Health Organization warns of severe medical equipment shortages.

Tracking Federal COVID-19 Relief Spending

When Congress passed the coronavirus relief bill, lawmakers knew that trillions of dollars in new federal spending would be needed to stabilize the economy, rescue workers and the unemployed, and provide essential public health resources to fight the pandemic. Oversight of that spending is equally necessary. Providing user-friendly access to data on federal crisis spending is a critical step in being able to evaluate whether the government succeeded in its mission.

To aid that effort, POGO committed to tracking as much of the spending as possible so that we could evaluate whether the money was actually directed to those most in need.


Visit www.covidtracker.pogo.org to explore the data!

Putting the Numbers into Context

In November, POGO launched our full **COVID-19 relief spending tracker** (we had released more limited versions earlier in the year). The tracker includes over **15 million transactions**, accounting for **\$1.6 trillion** in assistance in the form of loans, grants, and contracts—**\$1.4 billion** of which was not officially accounted for by the federal government. The website provides an industry-by-industry spending breakdown, as well as a state, county, and zip code

mapping feature with data on demographics, population, and unemployment at each level.

Our tracker puts COVID-19 relief spending into context and helps the public, civil society, and journalists better understand where our tax dollars were spent, and whether they were directed to communities most in need. We also added a tip line through which users can report wrongdoing within federal COVID-19 relief spending to POGO.



POGO's COVID-19 relief spending tracker received three CSS Design Awards (an international award that recognizes innovation in web design and development) for user interface, user experience, and innovation.

79 **March 21st**
3.3 million Americans file unemployment claims for the week ending on this day.

85 **March 27th**
The CARES Act becomes law.

Find out where COVID-19 funds were spent.

SEARCH BY STATE, COUNTY, ZIP CODE For additional filters, go to table view

\$1.6T
Overall Spending

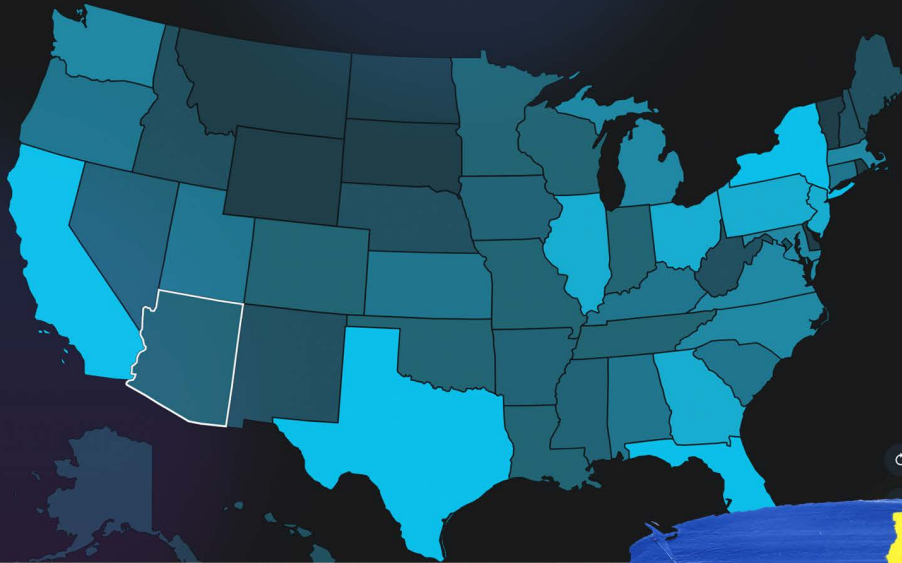
\$923.1B
Loans

\$547.3B
Direct Payments

\$74.5B
Grants

\$26.6B
Contract Spending

\$17.3B
Other



Total Covid Spending vs

- Unemployment
- Population
- Minority Population %

Sign up

To read up on all the latest reporting and analysis covering coronavirus relief spending, please sign up for our weekly COVID-19 newsletter.

Our COVID-19 Relief Spending Tracker uses millions of transactions and awards to help users follow the money and answer the tough questions. Who got money? How much? From which agencies? What for?

Pushing for Better Data

Our tracker also highlights the limitations of the spending data the government has made available. There is no central repository where all federal spending data is disclosed, making it difficult for regular people to find information. The public still doesn't have access to data about loan recipient location, information on parent companies of recipients, or detailed descriptions of what the award or contract was for. And, perhaps most importantly, the public doesn't have a way to find out how many employees the loan recipients were able to keep employed as a result of receiving the funding.

We know lawmakers are paying attention. In a June hearing, Senator Rob Portman

(R-OH) asked the acting director of the Office of Management and Budget a series of questions based on the problems **POGO identified with the agency's guidance on how to implement the relief bill's reporting requirements.**

POGO will continue to work with decision-makers on improving data collection and reporting practices so the public will be able to more effectively hold the government accountable for its response, and ensure future emergency stimulus money gets to communities, businesses, and individuals most affected by the crisis at hand.

91 April 2nd
Trump invokes the Defense Production Act to increase production of N95 masks.

100 April 10th
The 50th US State (WY) is under a disaster declaration.

Uncovering Corruption and Abuse in COVID-19 Spending

The task of the federal government is to adopt and implement policies that benefit and protect the public, especially in a time of crisis. POGO conducted a series of deep-dive investigations into the federal government's COVID-19 spending, which revealed that much of the money in the coronavirus relief bill did not make it to the communities suffering the most.

Revealing Bailouts for the Wealthy

The Paycheck Protection Program—one of the largest programs in the relief bill—was designed to help small businesses that were struggling as a result of the pandemic stay afloat by giving them forgivable loans meant to keep their staff employed. Data from the program indicates that more than half of the \$660 billion aimed at small- and mid-sized companies went to bigger businesses, and more than 25% of the money went to a mere 1% of loan recipients.

A joint investigation by **POGO and the Anti-Corruption Data Collective** revealed that **hundreds of companies backed by wealthy private equity investors received loans.**

Meanwhile, cash-strapped mom and pop businesses directly affected by the pandemic had difficulty obtaining loans, especially Black- and Latino/a-owned businesses. A source in the Small Business Administration, the agency that oversees the loan program, told a POGO investigator that the program was “a disaster.”

One of the government's key efforts to keep the U.S. public employed during the pandemic-induced economic downturn provided a windfall for wealthy businesses at the expense of smaller community-based businesses that desperately needed the funds to survive.

Revealing a Fraud Free-for-All

The Small Business Administration itself acknowledged that there are “lowered guardrails required by Congress with respect to fraud prevention” in the Paycheck Protection Program, making it easy for bad actors to lie their way into loans. **A POGO investigation analyzed 56 cases** of alleged fraud in the program accounting for more than **\$113 million in fraudulent loans.** In the majority of the cases, the loan applicant had allegedly falsified payroll documents to make themselves appear to be eligible for a loan or to make themselves appear to be eligible for a larger amount. In 18 cases, individuals allegedly created bogus companies in order to receive loans.

It's likely that the fraud uncovered to date is only the tip of the iceberg, and it could take years of investigation to uncover it all and reveal where the money truly went.

A POGO investigation analyzed 56 cases of alleged fraud in the program accounting for more than \$113 million in fraudulent loans.



Investigating Federal Loan Money Sent Abroad

Not only was there rampant fraud within the Paycheck Protection Program but also there were millions of dollars in questionable loans distributed to foreign entities through that program. Another **POGO joint investigation with the Anti-Corruption Data Collective** found that at least **two Chinese state-owned companies** received loans worth up to **\$6 million**. And our joint investigation into

wealthy Ukrainian oligarch Rinat Akhmetov, who owns four coal mining operations across Appalachia, revealed that his company received over **\$21 million in forgivable loans**. His company, United Coal, had racked up more than \$13 million in fines for federal health and safety violations in the last decade. The loan amount Akhmetov received far exceeded those fines.

Scrutinizing Lobbyists on the COVID-19 Response

In October, POGO published an investigation into the human organ procurement industry's aggressive lobbying efforts to defeat new bipartisan rules that would hold the industry accountable for poor performance. The rules would also streamline the organ procurement process thereby making thousands more organs available for transplant every year. **POGO found** that at the same time the industry was **pouring lobbying money into their battle over the new rules, companies in the industry were approved for more**

than \$100 million in federal Paycheck Protection Program loans.

Following the investigation, the **Senate Finance Committee sent a letter citing POGO's investigation** to the Department of Health and Human Services inquiring about oversight of the organ procurement and transplantation systems. The new organ procurement rule was finalized in late November.

Supporting a Peaceful Transfer of Power

The 2020 election was unlike any other in our nation's history. Government officials actively and intentionally undermined the results of the election and impeded the transfer of power to the duly elected president, threatening the very foundation of our democracy. In the face of this, POGO worked hard with both Congress and the incoming administration to ensure that the reins of the government were handed over as efficiently as possible.



Orienting Congress

POGO's Congressional Oversight Initiative has a long history of training Hill staff on conducting effective oversight. In 2020, **POGO** branched out and **worked directly with elected members of Congress as well**. We were approached by several good government organizations working with the House Select

Committee on the Modernization of Congress to hold a virtual orientation in December for newly elected members of Congress before they were sworn in. That training focused on providing practical knowledge that incoming representatives would need to conduct effective oversight.

Consulting with Agencies

After Joe Biden was declared the winner of the election, multiple agency review teams **reached out to POGO to discuss priorities for reform, and plans for potential obstacles the teams might face**, an indication that POGO is seen as a subject matter expert and

that our recommendations for reform are trusted by government decision-makers. We met with representatives of the review teams for the Department of Defense, Department of Justice, Office of Personnel Management, and Office of Management and Budget.

Preserving Documents

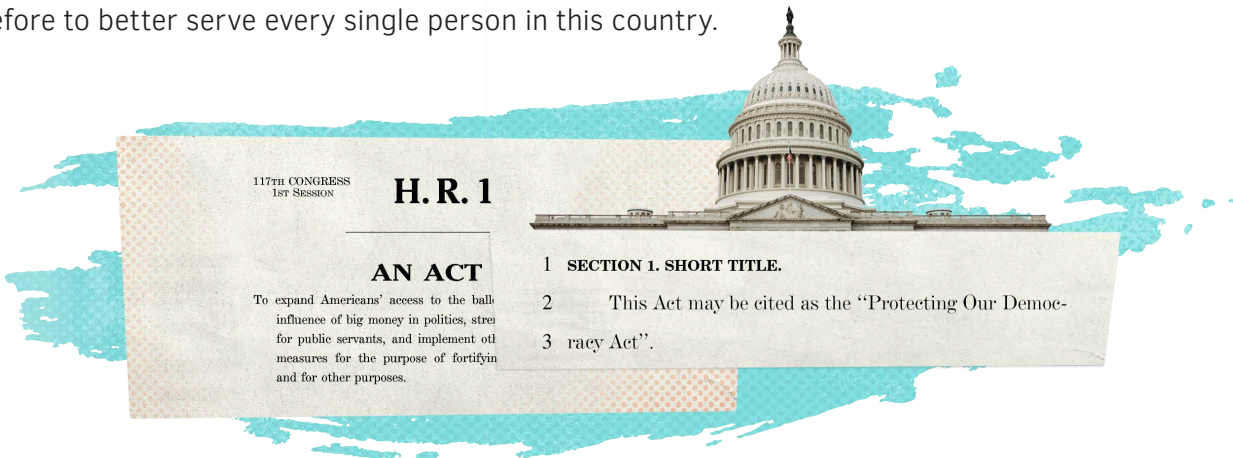
One of the most common concerns among civil society groups during the transition was the potential for outgoing Trump administration officials to destroy, remove, or alter official records vital to accountability and required by law to be preserved. POGO worked with partner organizations and congressional offices to ensure that executive

agencies adhered to document preservation laws. **We provided direct advice and support** to congressional offices working on the issue, published a set of practical resources for Hill offices to use when inquiring about documents from specific agencies, and sent letters to agencies highlighting the importance of preserving official records.

Rebuilding Democracy

On January 6, 2021, our democracy came far too close to the brink of disaster. After a year already filled with crises, the world watched in horror as United States government officials worked to undermine the results of a free and fair election, which culminated in an insurrection on Capitol Hill. Lawmakers, their staff, Capitol workers, and the press feared for their lives, and our democracy hung in the balance.

This event was the culmination of decades of structural weaknesses in our system of government. The cracks in that structure must be repaired, and our democracy must be rebuilt stronger than before to better serve every single person in this country.



Working Toward Transformational Reform ---

POGO has spent decades fighting for reforms that will ensure that our institutions root out corruption, prevent abuses of power, and serve the best interests of the U.S. public. While there is no single reform that can fix every weakness laid bare in recent years, the For the People Act and the Protecting Our Democracy Act go a long way toward addressing significant problems.

POGO testified before Congress twice in 2019 on the For the People Act, and **continued to help build support for the legislation in 2020.**

The Protecting Our Democracy Act incorporates reforms from several previously

introduced stand-alone bills that had been informed by our work. Our staff also worked with a small coalition of civil society organizations **to review and provide feedback on the legislative text prior to its introduction in September 2020.**

This year we are actively working to build bipartisan support for both bills in both the House and the Senate. These bills will rein in the power of the office of the president, enhance Congressional oversight capacity, reassert Congress' power of the purse, protect government whistleblowers, strengthen the independence of inspectors general, and reform the National Emergencies Act.

The Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency replicated POGO's vacancy tracker and launched it publicly in early 2020. The tool is an effort to make the inspector general system more transparent, and it received bipartisan support in Congress before being launched.



Introducing POGO's New Civic Engagement Program

As part of our new strategy to mobilize communities most affected by our issues, POGO launched our civic engagement program in 2020. This program works with advocates across the country to help connect people to their lawmakers on issues of corruption and abuse of power.

When lawmakers hear concerns directly from the people they represent, they are much more likely to support reforms that address those concerns.

Over 53,000 individual actions were taken over 2020



States where we mobilized local leaders to engage their community and lawmakers on pandemic crisis response

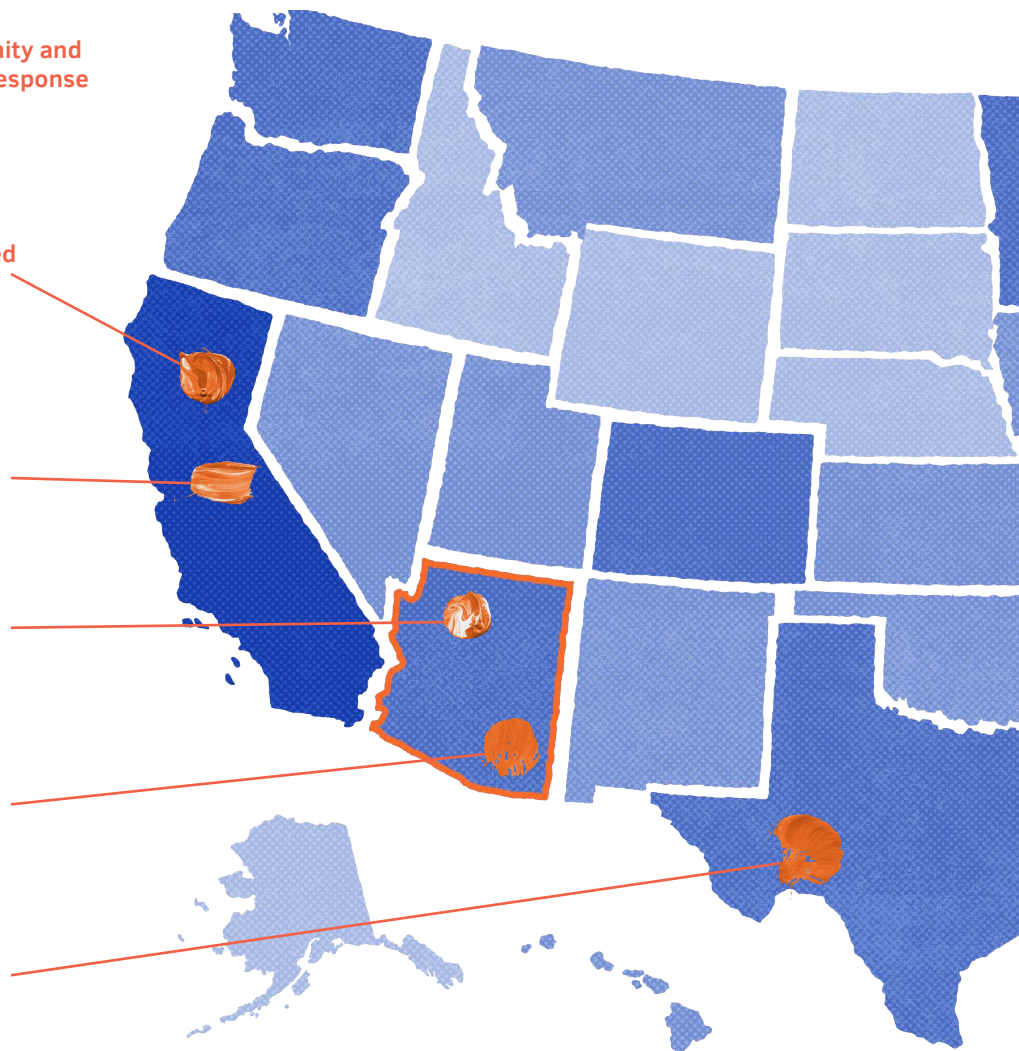
After our town hall on protecting civil liberties during the pandemic, Representative Jackie Speier (D-CA) **introduced legislation that incorporated POGO recommendations** to ensure contact tracing tools like phone apps were secure and protected users' privacy.

377 Californians sent letters to their representative calling on Congress to reverse the militarization of police.

Local government leaders published two op-eds, and a small business owner published a letter to the editor in a local media outlet.

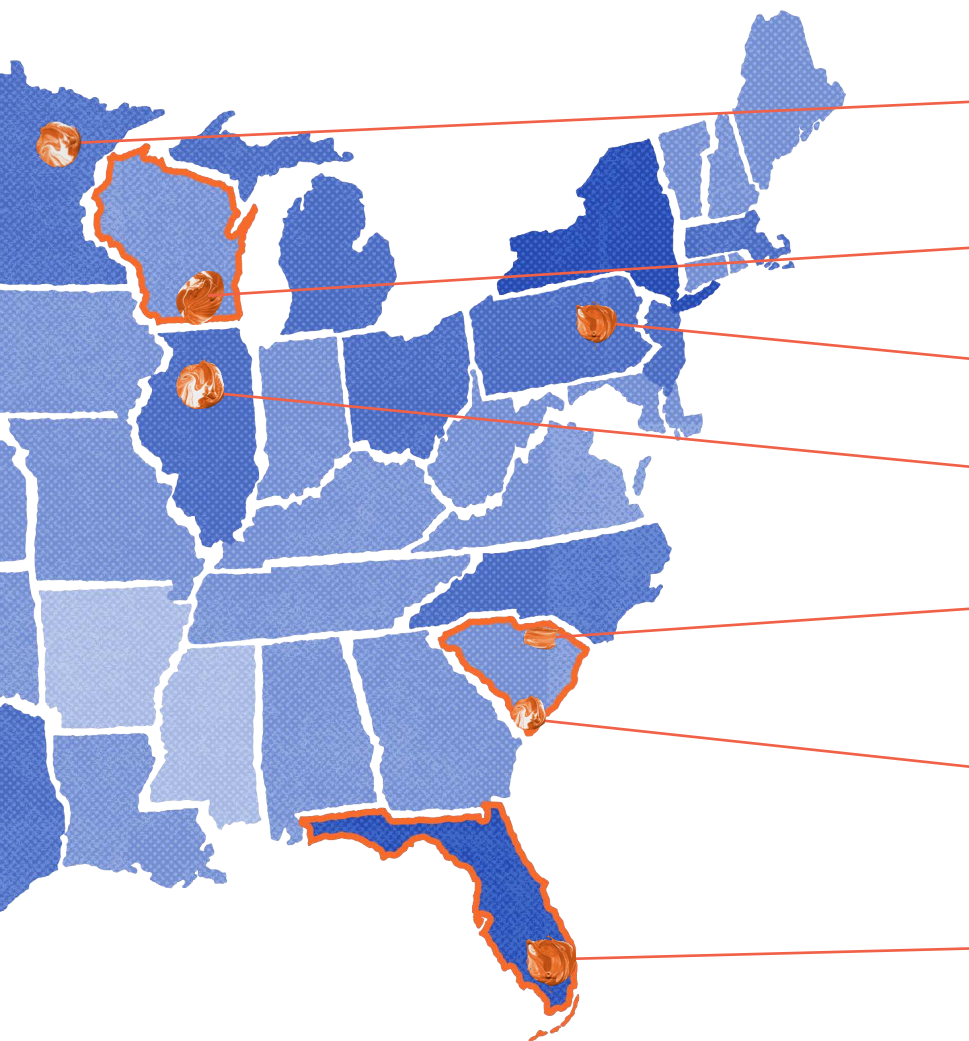
POGO participated in a community roundtable on government fraud and waste hosted by the Arizona Capitol Times called Morning Scoop.

165 Texans sent letters to their representative calling on Congress to reverse the militarization of police.



Overview

- POGO kicked-off two campaigns this year: **Advocates for Truthtellers**, which supports our whistleblower and inspectors general work, and **Advocates for Defense Accountability**, which works to reduce waste and address undue influence in the Pentagon. **767** people signed up to be advocates for these campaigns in 2020.
- Our supporters sent over **38,000** letters and emails to members of Congress and the President in 2020 demanding accountability and reform.
- POGO hosted eight virtual town halls for the public on issues ranging from facial recognition to the Pentagon's budget. Over **700** people attended at least one of these events.



60 POGO supporters in Minnesota sent letters to their representative calling on Congress to reverse the militarization of police.

Held a roundtable with Representative Gwen Moore (D-WI).

A POGO supporter published a letter to the editor in their local paper.

Our supporters in Illinois took **1,761** advocacy actions with us in 2020.

Held two local roundtable meetings with staff for Representative Jeff Duncan (R-SC), and Senator Tim Scott (R-SC).

A local business leader published a letter to the editor in a local Charleston paper, and an expert on South Carolina tax issues published an op-ed in a local journal.

210 Floridians sent letters to their representative calling on Congress to reverse the militarization of police.

Help enact change!

If you want to take action, learn how to become a POGO Advocate for the issues you care most about: pogo.quorum.us/issues

2020 Financials

Our commitment to you:

POGO accepts gifts from individuals and institutions that are committed to the principles of democracy, racial justice, inclusion, and equity. We reserve the right to decline gifts and donations from individuals and institutions that advocate viewpoints or engage in activities that contradict these values. POGO does not knowingly accept contributions from for-profit corporations, labor unions, any government, or anyone who stands to benefit financially from our work, in order to preserve our independence.

POGO reviews all contributions exceeding \$2,000 in order to maintain this standard. POGO accepts employee- and customer-directed contributions and matching funds, and accepts contributions from law firms, which we limit to less than 1% of POGO's operating budget.

Revenue

Grants	\$5,647,000
Contributions	\$1,100,233
Other Income	\$1,977,842
Total	\$8,725,075

Expenses

Program	\$6,559,284
General & Administrative	\$541,554
Development	\$560,169
Total	\$7,661,007

This statement of activities from January 1, 2020, to December 31, 2020, has been audited.

POGO's full, audited financial statements and 990 forms are available at:
pogo.org/about/financial-information.

Administrative (7%) Development (7%)





Thank You To Our Staff



None of POGO's wins this year could have been accomplished without our staff. Our team did an amazing job of pivoting to remote work this year, and we feel lucky to be surrounded by such dedicated colleagues. Thank you!

Thank You To Our Supporters

POGO wouldn't be here without you. We extend our deep gratitude to all of our 2020 donors for making our work possible. In addition to general program supporters, POGO is also grateful to those who gave to our CDI/Straus Military Reform Project and The Constitution Project, through our monthly giving program, and through the Combined Federal Campaign. Names indicated in orange and with an asterisk are monthly supporters.

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Estate of William M. Burke

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\$500,000 +

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Explore:

pogo.plannedgiving.org



New Staff



Brandon Brockmyer, Director of Research

Brandon oversees a team of investigators and analysts, and manages POGO's editorial and fact-checking process. He is an internationally recognized expert on government transparency and accountability, with over a decade of experience monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of government policies and social programs.



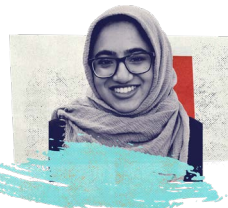
Emma Coghlan, Social Media Editor

Emma runs POGO's social media channels. Before joining POGO, she spent more than two years as the Digital Communications Manager for Senator Tom Udall (D-NM).



Spurthi Kontham, Communications Associate

Spurthi helps coordinate POGO's content, events, and email engagement. She is a 2020 graduate of New York University.



Aisha Shafi, Program Associate (COI)

Aisha assists the Congressional Oversight Initiative with coordinating trainings and boot camps for Hill staff. She graduated from George Mason University in 2019.



Walt Shaub, Senior Ethics Fellow

Walter Shaub is a government ethics expert who has advocated for accountability across a career in public service. Before joining POGO, Walt served for four years as the Director of the Office of Government Ethics.



Renzo Velez, Designer

Renzo uses visual design to accompany and aid the storytelling of POGO's work and mission. Before joining POGO, Renzo did extensive freelance work as Renzo Velez Design and Photography.



Melissa Wasser, Policy Counsel

Melissa provides legal guidance and support to POGO's policy team. Before joining POGO, Melissa worked for the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, and is a 2017 double graduate of The Ohio State University.

Current Staff

Scott Amey, General Counsel and Executive Editorial Director

Jordan Bollman, Digital Communications Manager

Danielle Brian, Executive Director

Brandon Brockmyer, Director of Research

Halley Brown, Video Production Associate

Emma Coghlan, Social Media Editor

Alexis DiSanza, Grants Management Associate

Danni Downing, Senior Editor

Tim Farnsworth, Executive Strategist

Ned Feder, Staff Scientist

Leslie Garvey, Creative Director

Neil Gordon, Senior Researcher

Dan Grazier, Jack Shanahan Military Fellow

Danielle Harris, Director of Operations

Katherine Hawkins, Senior Legal Analyst, The Constitution Project

Dylan Hedter-Gaudette, Government Affairs Manager

Liz Hempowicz, Director of Public Policy

David S. Hilzenrath, Lead Enterprise and Investigative Reporter

David Janovsky, Analyst, The Constitution Project

Spurthi Kontham, Communications Associate

Jake Laperruque, Senior Counsel, The Constitution Project

Caitlin MacNeal, Communications Manager

Lynn Mandell, Financial Manager

Johanna Mingos, Data Intelligence Strategist

Sean Moulton, Senior Policy Analyst

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Walter Shaub, Senior Ethics Fellow

Lance Sims, FOIA Litigation Manager

Mandy Smithberger, Director of The Center for Defense Information

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Emma Stodder, Associate Editor

Tim Stretton, Policy Analyst

Ryan Summers, Research Fellow

LaPorsha Thomas, Development Associate

Mark Thompson, National Security Analyst

Sarah Turberville, Director of The Constitution Project

Renzo Velez, Designer

Melissa Wasser, Policy Counsel

Adam Zagorin, Senior Journalist

Board Of Directors

Thank you David Hunter



The Project On Government Oversight's Board of Directors Chair, David Hunter, will be concluding his time as Chair after nearly 25 years of service to POGO. His tenure with POGO's board has been a cornerstone of the organization's successful growth from a four person staff when he started to our current staff of nearly 50 people.

David has stood strongly with the POGO staff and resolved to ensure the organization was a model nonprofit employer where one could choose to stay and have a career. He regularly engaged with staff and advocated for them to be present during Board meetings. David's leadership never wavered even in response to a crisis: during his tenure the organization was subpoenaed, threatened with lawsuits, surveilled and broken into.

David also helped ensure the organization's continued success by navigating POGO's acquisitions of several other nonprofits. Through this growth, he guided the expansion and focus of the organization's mission. David's work as Chair will always be remembered for the vision and wisdom he imparted.

POGO is grateful that David will remain on the board of directors and has passed that torch to recently elected Nithi Vivatrat, who has himself just celebrated his 10th anniversary as a member of POGO's Board of Directors.

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Watch



The Breakdown

Government can be wonky. We've got you covered with our video explainers

Watch:

youtube.com/pogowatchdog



Crowdcast

Join our panel of experts discussing some of the most pressing topics in government

Watch:

crowdcast.io/pogowatchdog

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The Paper Trail

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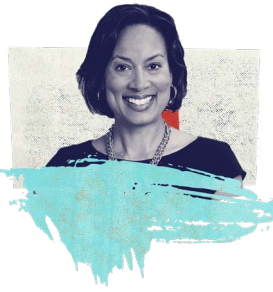
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New Members



Rebecca Adamson

Rebecca is an economist, leader, Cherokee activist, and ground-breaking indigenous woman. She is the founder and former president of First Peoples Worldwide, the first US-based global Indigenous Peoples NGO. She holds a distinct perspective on how indigenous people's values and economic systems can transform the business models of today.



Lia Epperson

Lia is Professor of Law at American University Washington College of Law. A nationally recognized expert in the areas of civil rights, constitutional law, and education policy, her scholarship centers on the constitutional dialogue between federal courts and the political branches, and its implications for educational equity.

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