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Mr Bill Moyers

The Schumann Foundation
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Mr. Moyers,

My name is Rob Levine, and I run a media criticism organization located in Minneapolis, Minnesota called Cursor, Inc. (now a 501(c)(3)). Cursor produces two websites. The first, www.Cursor.org, is a portal to local and national media criticism, updated weekly, along with a smattering of our own content, and links to the best media research tools, media critics, and media organizations available on the Internet.

Our second website is called www.MediaTransparency.org, and is an outgrowth of research I did on a local think tank called the *Center of the American Experiment*. While looking into the funding of the Center I found an IRS Form 990 report at the State of Minnesota Attorney General's office that showed that it had received some monies from an organization called the *Bradley Foundation*. A quick investigation into the Bradley foundation sent me on a hunt to see who and what else they were underwriting, and it turned out that not only were they helping to pay for almost every presenter who had appeared at the *Center of the American Experiment*, but they also appeared to be dispensing their funding in concert with other philanthropies. At that point I ordered 15 years worth of IRS Form 990s from the Bradley foundation, for which I paid them \$200, and began creating my grants database.

The episode made me realize that it would be great if there were a website, free to all (especially journalists) that would allow researchers to interactively search all the grants made by those philanthropies over a set period of time, i.e. 15 years. There is presently nothing even remotely resembling this proposed database available anywhere, including the Internet. Since I am by trade a computer programmer, and had begun to create the database, I decided to go ahead and create the website on my own, which is what I have done at www.MediaTransparency.org.

Right now we have in our hands about half of the grant reports we need – 107 out of 225. We have entered the grants of 70 of those reports into our database, which currently comprises some 12,000 grants and more than 1,800 recipients, all searchable either in very simple forms, i.e. for a particular recipient, and in

complex forms, i.e. by combining criteria such as *funder*, *dates*, *recipient*, or *grant purpose*.

We would like to be able to expeditiously fill out the rest of our database, but we are unfortunately short of funds. We estimate that some \$10,000 to \$20,000 is needed to obtain the missing 100+ grant lists and enter them into the database. I've included a preliminary budget along with this letter. Once we get completely up and running we'll be seeking to expand our activities, including doing more research into the recipients and results of the grants, both independently and as aggregate bodies of grants. We're already working on the materials to help us find other sources of income, including a web appeal, new printed brochures, and a possible fundraiser here in Minneapolis.

A fleshed-out grants database could be of enormous use to journalists trying to write about the media and the conservative movement. An example of such use might be something like Eric Alterman's recent story (The 'Right' Books and Big Ideas – *The Nation*, Nov. 1999) about how conservative philanthropies subsidize the publication of books that advance the movement's goals. Using our database he would have been able to look up all the grants made to individuals, organizations, or by free-text (i.e. 'book'). For example, I just tried a search for the text "support a book," and it came back with 144 grants worth more than \$4.5 million! Similar results are found when searching for words like "documentary" (62 grants, \$4.2 million).

Recently a conservative-movement funded researcher named Paul Peterson has released new "research" results purporting that poor, inner-city voucher-funded students do better academically than their public school counterparts. Visitors to our website would know that Peterson is in fact a conservative movement funded scholar—receiving more than half a million dollars, and that much of his research has not been peer reviewed, and was first published in the *Wall Street Journal*.

Of course there are other, equally troubling facets of the conservative funding which would be good fodder for writers, including the wining and dining of state and federal judges at so-called "economics institutes," the ever-increasing and pervasive funding advocating for privatization of many facets of government, and the increasing penetration of the popular culture (especially the news media) by the sponsored members of the conservative movement. Just as today it is much easier for citizens and journalists to follow political money trails, we wish to do the same for conservative foundations. In fact, "The Money Behind The Media" is our website's tagline.

Thanks for taking the time to read my letter, and if you should need any more information whatsoever, please write, phone or email.

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