



NO BILLIONAIRES IN OUR BACKYARD

THE BIG TECH BILLIONAIRES TAKING OVER AUSTIN, TEXAS

September 2026

Report by LittleSis and VOCAL-TX



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INTRODUCTION

On New Year's Day in 2026, venture capitalist and Trump's AI and Crypto Czar David Sacks, [tweeted](#) that "[a]s a response to socialism, Miami will replace NYC as the finance capital and Austin will replace SF as the tech capital."

Sacks is one of a group of previously California-based Big Tech [billionaires](#) who recently relocated to Texas in order to [avoid paying income taxes](#) (Texas has no income tax and the [7th most regressive tax structure](#) in the country) and exploit the state's hands-off regulatory environment. Many of these new arrivals are part of PayPal co-founders Elon Musk and Peter Thiel's network of friends and proteges. This cadre of billionaire Texas transplants includes Musk himself – whose net worth tops \$900 billion as of September 2026 and has reportedly paid [just a 3% income tax rate](#) – and they arrived with ambitions of remaking the state's politics to realize their [vision](#) of a society where technology and AI affords luxury and comfort for the ultra-rich, enforced by mass surveillance, violence, and economic exploitation of everybody else.

For his part, Governor Greg Abbott has embraced the influx of billionaires at the expense of working Texans. Abbott has accepted [millions of dollars](#) from billionaires, passed [billionaire-backed policies](#) such as [school voucher](#) legislation, a [statewide camping](#) ban, and militarization of the border, and indicated that the state government will do everything in its power to aid billionaires in growing their profits.

Texas has long been among the states with the most billionaires, due in large part to its oil and gas industry. But over the past decade the [number of billionaires](#) in the state has skyrocketed, going from 48 in 2015 to 83 in 2025. Billionaires have received [massive tax breaks](#), bought up [luxury real estate](#), and [spent millions](#) to [shape](#) federal, state, and local elections, driving a worsening [cost of living crisis](#) for working class families in Texas. Since 2020, Texans' electricity bills have risen by [40%](#). 64% of Texans say they think [unions are beneficial for workers](#), but union density has [fallen](#) since the early 1990s due to state electeds implementing "right-to-work" and limiting collective bargaining rights. And Texans are facing dangerous and in some cases life-threatening impacts of [extreme heat](#) due to climate change.

In this report, we profile seven big tech billionaires living in Austin, highlighting the impacts of their businesses, political lobbying, and political spending on the lives of everyday Texans.

KEY FINDINGS

In this report, we profile seven big tech billionaires who live in Austin, Texas. With the exception of Joe Liemandt, they have all moved to Austin since the pandemic, seeking lower taxes on the ultra-rich and a pro-corporate regulatory environment.

The seven billionaires profiled in this report and their net worths as of September 11, 2026 are:

Elon Musk - Net worth: \$908.9 billion

CEO of Space X, CEO of Tesla, Executive Chairman of X

Joe Lonsdale - Net worth: \$3.4 billion

Founder of 8VC, Co-Founder of Palantir

Travis Kalanick - Net worth: \$3.3 billion

Co-founder and former CEO of Uber, CEO of Atoms

David Sacks - Net worth: \$250 million-\$2 billion

Trump's AI and Crypto Czar, Co-founder of Craft Ventures

Joseph Liemandt - Net worth: \$7.6 billion

Chairman of Trilogy, Principal of Alpha School

Joe Gebbia - Net worth: \$9.3 billion

Co-founder and board member of Airbnb

Luke Nosek - Net worth: \$5.5 billion

Co-founder and partner at Gigafund, board member at SpaceX

We found...

- These seven big tech billionaires are collectively worth \$940 billion, or more than 10 million times the [median household income in Austin](#). \$908.9 million of this total comes from Elon Musk's net worth alone.
- These seven big tech billionaires donated at least \$14.6 million combined to state-level candidates and committees in Texas since 2020. Top recipients of donations from these billionaires include:
 - **\$4.2 million** combined from Elon Musk, Joe Lonsdale, and Luke Nosek to Judicial Fairness PAC, a committee focused on electing business-friendly judges to Texas appellate courts
 - **\$4 million** combined from Elon Musk and Luke Nosek to Texans for Lawsuit Reform, a committee focused on making the Texas legal system more friendly to big business
 - **\$3.1 million** combined from Elon Musk, Joe Liemandt, and Joseph Gebbia to Governor Greg Abbott
 - **\$500,000** from Elon Musk Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick
 - **\$624,000** combined from Elon Musk and Luke Nosek to Texas Senate Leadership Fund, Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick's committee to support the state Senate's conservative majority

We found...

- These seven big tech billionaires have made campaign contributions seeking to shape Austin's political landscape. These contributions include:
 - **\$161,316** combined from Joe Liemandt and Luke Nosek to Stand Together Austin, a committee supporting Austin Mayor Kirk Watson's 2022 campaign
 - **\$90,000** combined from Joe Liemandt and Joe Lonsdale to Save Austin Now PAC, a committee that supported Prop B, Austin's homeless camping ban initiative, and is currently supporting a ballot initiative to audit the city of Austin
 - **\$55,000** combined from Joe Liemandt and Joe Lonsdale to Restore Leadership ATX, a committee that opposed Prop F, an initiative to make Austin a strong-mayor system
 - Elon Musk, Joe Lonsdale, and Joe Liemandt made contributions to committees supporting Jeremy Sylvestine and opposing Garza for Travis County District Attorney. According to the Wall Street Journal, Musk funneled hundreds of thousands of dollars to Saving Austin, a group that spent over \$650,000 on television ads and other advertising attacking incumbent District Attorney José Garza. Joe Lonsdale and Joe Liemandt gave \$25,000 and \$20,000, respectively to Sylvestine's candidate committee.

We found...

- Through both their political advocacy and business dealings, these big tech billionaires are shaping a wide range of issues that hurt everyday Texans, including homelessness policy, surveillance and deportations, and education privatization. Key examples include:
 - **Homelessness criminalization** - Joe Lonsdale founded the Cicero Institute, a constellation of entities that produce policy papers and model legislation as well as lobby state and local level governments on Lonsdale's areas of policy interest, primarily criminalizing and seeking harsh punishments for homelessness. The Cicero Institute advocates draconian measures targeting unhoused people, pushing for fines of as much as \$5,000 for violating camping bans and defunding long-term "housing first" solutions in favor of punishment and incarceration, including making it easier to involuntarily commit unhoused people to psychiatric institutions.
 - **Surveillance and deportations** - Joe Lonsdale is a co-founder of the data mining and military technology corporation Palantir, which is used extensively by federal immigration enforcement agencies to analyze troves of personal data, including phone numbers, addresses, social media accounts, and financial information, to locate and track their targets. Palantir's software has become essential to the Trump administration's anti-immigrant crusade. According to Forbes, Lonsdale's Palantir shares skyrocketed in value after Trump was elected, making him a billionaire. According to data analyzed by the Deportation Data Project, ICE arrests with detention in Texas soared from 24,499 in 2024 to 68,617 in 2025. In just the first eight months of 2026, ICE has booked 53,871 people into detention centers in Texas, where migrants face brutal and dehumanizing conditions. Austin Big Tech billionaires David Sacks and Luke Nosek have also been backers of Palantir.

Sacks was an early investor in Palantir. Luke Nosek was a co-founder and managing partner of the venture capital Founders Fund, Palantir's first institutional investor.

- **Education privatization** - Joe Liemandt is the president of and an investor in Alpha School, an AI-driven K-12 private school chain that claims it can teach students in just two hours a day. According to an investigation by the Texas Tribune and ProPublica, Alpha School is one of the largest private school chains benefiting from the state's new school voucher scheme. Joe Lonsdale also gave \$30,000 to Texas Federation for Children, a Betsy DeVos-linked committee that supported pro-school voucher candidates in 2023.

The chart below shows the top 15 recipients of campaign contributions from the seven Big Tech billionaires from 2015-2026, according to www.transparencyusa.org.

Big Tech Billionaires Statewide Political Spending in Texas, 2015-2026

Recipient name	Amount	Description
Judicial Fairness PAC	\$4,225,000.00	Committee focused on electing business-friendly judges
Elon Musk Revocable Trust	\$4,000,000.00	
Lonsdale Enterprises	\$210,000.00	
Nicole and Luke Nosek	\$15,000.00	
Texans for Lawsuit Reform PAC	\$4,010,000.00	Committee focused on making Texas' legal system friendly to big business
Elon Musk Revocable Trust	\$4,000,000.00	
Nicole and Luke Nosek	\$10,000.00	
Greg Abbott	\$3,125,000.00	Governor (R)
Elon Musk	\$500,000.00	
Joe Liemandt	\$125,000.00	
Joseph Gebbia	\$2,500,000.00	
Texas Senate Leadership Fund	\$624,350.00	Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick's committee to support the Senate's conservative majority
Elon Musk Revocable Trust	\$500,000.00	
Nicole and Luke Nosek	\$124,350.00	

Recipient and donors	Amount	Description
Texans for Reasonable Solutions PAC	\$451,000.00	YIMBY housing group
Nicole and Luke Nosek	\$451,000.00	
Dustin Burrows	\$272,905.08	Speaker of the Texas House of Representatives (R)
Elon Musk	\$250,000.00	
Joe Liemandt	\$10,000.00	
Joe Lonsdale	\$5,000.00	
Joseph Gebbia	\$5,205.08	
Nicole and Luke Nosek	\$2,700.00	
Ellen Troxclair	\$169,000.00	Texas House of Representatives, District 19 (R)
Joe Liemandt	\$154,000.00	
Joe Lonsdale	\$15,000.00	
Stand Together Austin (DISSOLVED)	\$161,316.11	Committee supporting Austin Mayor Kirk Watson's 2022 campaign
Joe Liemandt	\$121,316.11	
Joe Lonsdale	\$15,000.00	
Nicole and Luke Nosek	\$25,000.00	

Recipient and donor	Amount	Description
Save Austin Now PAC	\$90,000.00	Committee supported Prop B (homeless camping ban), ballot initiative to audit the city of Austin
Joe Liemandt	\$50,000.00	
Joe Lonsdale	\$40,000.00	
Bryan Hughes	\$62,410.00	Texas State Senate, District 1 (R)
Joe Lonsdale	\$10,000.00	
Nicole and Luke Nosek	\$52,410.00	
Restore Leadership ATX	\$55,000.00	Committee opposed Prop F (initiative to make Austin a strong-mayor system)
Joe Liemandt	\$50,000.00	
Lonsdale Enterprises	\$5,000.00	
Defend Rural Texas PAC	\$31,500.00	Anti-school choice committee
Nicole and Luke Nosek	\$31,500.00	
Texas Federation for Children PAC DIS-SOLVED)	\$30,000.00	Pro-school voucher committee
Lonsdale Enterprises	\$30,000.00	

Source: <https://www.transparencyusa.org/>

ELON MUSK,

SpaceX, X, Tesla, The Boring Company, Neuralink

[World's richest man](#), Elon Musk is perhaps the most infamous tech oligarch on the planet. While SpaceX began operating in Texas as far back as [2003](#), it wasn't until [2020](#) that Musk made a spectacle of leaving California and subsequently moved himself and most of his [corporate entities](#) to Texas – while also making plans to move his [children and their mothers](#) to Texas. Now, Musk owns a [\\$35 million compound in Austin](#) and reportedly sometimes [resides](#) in two penthouses in the Austin Proper Hotel and Residences in downtown Austin. Tesla, X Corp, The Boring Company, and SpaceX are all [headquartered](#) in Texas, Musk is using nearly [90 different companies and LLCs](#) to buy up land across the state, and he has facilitated the incorporation of a new company town – [Starbase, TX](#) – to better accommodate his ambitions. A 2025 effort to map Musk's ever expanding [footprint](#) counted 500 properties across more than 6,000 acres owned by his various entities. Those totals are likely much larger by now and will continue to grow exponentially as Musk is looking to expand the SpaceXAI data [center buildout](#) across the state.

Allying with Governor Abbott and spending millions to shape Texas politics

As his corporations have taken up residence across Texas, Musk has in turn become deeply entwined in the Texas political power structure. Musk's lobbyists reported spending tens of thousands to [wine and dine](#) elected officials in 2025. Musk himself is especially cozy with Governor Greg Abbott, who he claims to text "[all the time](#)." In just the first six months of 2026 Musk funneled [\\$5 million](#) to ranking Texas Republicans and their PACs. He also [gave](#) \$2 million to the Texans for Lawsuit Reform PAC, which supports business-friendly candidates, and \$1 million to the Judicial Fairness PAC, which supports business-friendly judicial candidates.

In addition to Musk, Judicial Fairness PAC'S top donors have [included](#) billionaires Ken Fisher and Ross Perot Jr. An investigation by [Texas Standard](#) found that Judicial Fairness PAC used fearmongering tactics about bail reform to try to convince voters to elect business-friendly judges. The PAC paid for mailers suggesting that Democratic judges giving criminal defendants low or no bail were responsible for Dallas crime rates, but it did not endorse any judges that preside over criminal cases or set bail. Rather, they endorsed appellate judges who rule on cases that can impact big business. One Southern Methodist University political science professor [explained](#), "Petty crime is not what they're thinking about," he said. "What they're thinking about is a judiciary that will work with the Texas Legislature not to drive additional costs from regulation and legislation into their businesses so that more money drops straight to the bottom line."

Musk also sought to influence the Travis County District Attorney race in 2024. According to [The Wall Street Journal](#), Musk funneled hundreds of thousands of dollars to the race, in an attempt to unseat District Attorney José Garza. Musk funded a group called Saving Austin, which spent over [\\$650,000](#) on television ads and other advertising attacking the District Attorney. A [flyer](#) produced by the group, which was condemned by both Garza and his opponent Jeremy Sylestine, read, “José Garza is filling Austin’s streets with pedophiles and killers. The next victim could be your loved one.”

All told, Musk is expected to spend [up to \\$200 million](#) on the midterms nationwide, including in Texas.

Governor Abbott has fully embraced Musk, calling him “[the leading visionary of our time](#)” and ensuring that Musk’s projects receive ample subsidies, as well as regulatory ease. In 2020, he told the press that Texas would allow Musk to “[expand the way he wanted to expand](#).” Indeed, Musk and his army of [lobbyists](#) – which include former advisers and staffers for Gov. Greg Abbott – have enjoyed outsized legislative wins. Here’s what they won in 2025 alone:

- Starbase became [an official city](#) in 2025 after a vote in Boca Chica (where the majority of voters work for SpaceX), giving SpaceX greater control over how the area is developed. They also were able to change regulatory oversight of the highway and gulf beaches near Starbase to better facilitate the SpaceX launch schedule. Starbase and its city commissioners (two of the three commissioners work for SpaceX) are now seeking to [expand](#) its land area by over 7,000 acres.
- Blocked [legislation](#) that would regulate autonomous vehicles like his Robotaxi fleet.
- Stymied a [proposal](#) that would have forced the building of buffer zones between communities and large-scale energy storage facilities like the ones sold by Tesla.

- Won [legislation](#) that allows SpaceX to skirt public meetings laws in certain contexts. This measure was [widely opposed](#) by residents who live near SpaceX facilities.
- Finally, they successfully won [legislation](#) that labeled spaceports like the one used by SpaceX as “critical infrastructure” with increased charges and penalties for any arrests in those areas, a tactic that has been used to criminalize protest against oil and gas pipelines.

Massive tax breaks

In addition to his legislative wins, Musk is raking in tax breaks, subsidies, and abatements, in many instances despite increasing community opposition. A list of just some of his tax breaks includes:

- In 2020 Tesla received subsidies worth [\\$64 million](#) for building a Gigafactory that would become its [headquarters](#) just outside of Austin. While happily accepting these subsidies, in 2024 Tesla leveraged a new Texas law that allowed it to [de-annex itself](#) from the city of [Austin’s jurisdiction](#) and the regulatory oversight that comes with it.
- SpaceX won a [100% property tax abatement](#) from Grimes County, Texas and a [\\$30 million](#) grant from the state of Texas, in June of 2026 for its Terafab semiconductor chip manufacturing facility, ignoring concerns and opposition from the residents of the small community. Residents expressed skepticism about the project given its rushed permitting and concerns about the environmental, health, and life quality impacts that the mega facility will bring.
- SpaceX was deemed eligible to receive [millions](#) in tax refunds through the Texas Enterprise Zone Program, even though the program is ostensibly designed to encourage new business development in economically distressed areas. SpaceX sought the refunds for expansions in communities in which it was already operating.

- In 2015 SpaceX received [\\$15 million](#) in economic development subsidies from Texas for building the first commercial launch pad in the state.

While Musk builds his empire by lining his pockets with taxpayer funds, what do everyday Texans get in return? Cities across the Lone Star State are facing [major budget shortfalls](#) and are forced into layoffs of public workers and cuts to public services like parks, libraries, and housing. Texas' [10 largest school districts](#) are all projecting or operating on budgets with deficits.

Long-lasting environmental impacts

Musk's projects across the state are creating cascading ecological and quality of life impacts that threaten to haunt communities across the state for decades. SpaceX is [trashing Texas wetlands](#) with debris and wastewater from its launches, violating the [Clean Water Act](#), and endangering protected seabirds in one of Texas' last strips of undisturbed coastline. Numerous community complaints have been lodged due to ongoing [noise pollution](#) and impacts to the water supply, and the company has been [sued](#) for [illegal trespassing](#) and destruction of property, as impacts of construction incur into private land.

Tesla's lithium refinery near Corpus Christi was found to be discharging [black wastewater](#) containing toxic metals into a drainage ditch. The factory was discharging an average of 231,000 gallons of lithium refinery wastewater daily, which has catastrophic downstream impacts. The new Tesla Gigafactory outside of Austin similarly accumulated numerous [environmental violations](#) through its buildout. To top it all off, Tesla's autonomous Robotaxis, which have been involved in [17 reported](#) accidents in less than one year of operation, are [now flooding](#) Austin's streets unsupervised, putting pedestrians and drivers alike at risk.

Despite all of this, Elon simply views his grip on the state as [an expression](#) of American values: "It's a great state to do business in...It's super supportive, and I think really emblematic of American values. I love being here and love being a Texan."

JOE LONSDALE,

8VC, Palantir

Joe Lonsdale is a venture capital investor and acolyte of Peter Thiel, with whom he co-founded the data aggregation and military technology firm Palantir in 2003. Currently, Forbes estimates Lonsdale's net worth at [\\$3.4 billion](#), and Lonsdale leads the venture capital firm 8VC, which invests in [surveillance and military technology](#) in addition to other industries. Lonsdale also [founded](#) the Cicero Institute, a constellation of entities that produce policy papers and model legislation as well as lobby state and local level governments on Lonsdale's areas of policy interest, primarily criminalizing and seeking [harsh punishments](#) for homelessness. Cicero has been credited with [shaping](#) Trump's homelessness policy. Lonsdale's personal company gave [\\$1 million](#) to a PAC that supported Trump in the 2024 election

Lonsdale moved to Austin in 2020 in order to [avoid paying income taxes](#) in his native California, buying an \$8 million, [11-room mansion](#) on the city's west side. Since then, he has become a [billionaire](#) thanks to Palantir's essential role in migrant detention and deportation. He also launched a nationwide campaign to [criminalize and punish unhoused people](#), and used his money and connections to reshape politics to his liking both in Austin and across Texas. Lonsdale is also a co-founder and current chair of the [University of Austin](#), an as-yet unaccredited school formed along with right wing commentator Bari Weiss formed as a reaction to perceived "wokeness" in higher education.

Powering the engine behind Trump's deportation machine

As mentioned above, Lonsdale is a co-founder of the data mining and military technology corporation Palantir, which is used extensively by federal immigration enforcement agencies to analyze troves of personal data, including phone numbers, addresses, social media accounts, and financial information, to locate and track their targets. Palantir's software has become essential to the Trump administration's anti-immigrant crusade, described as "[mission critical](#)" in government funding documents obtained by the Intercept. In April 2025, ICE entered into a new [\\$30 million contract](#) with Palantir to develop a new software platform for immigration raids, detention, and deportation.

Though Lonsdale stopped working at Palantir [in 2009](#), he retained a stake in the company. After Trump's re-election in November 2024 on promises to effect mass deportations – which Lonsdale supported as a donor to and fundraiser for the America PAC independent expenditure committee – Lonsdale's Palantir shares [skyrocketed in value](#), making him a billionaire. In mid-November 2024, [Forbes](#) estimated that Lonsdale had a 1% stake in the company worth about \$1 billion. Today Forbes estimates Lonsdale's net worth at [\\$3.4 billion](#).

While Palantir has elevated Lonsdale from the ranks of the merely very rich to the stratospheric heights of billionairehood, the corporation has turbo-charged ICE's detention and deportation regime. According to data analyzed by [the Deportation Data Project](#), ICE arrests with detention in Texas [soared](#) from 24,499 in 2024 to 68,617 in 2025. In just the first eight months of 2026, ICE has booked [53,871 people](#) into detention centers in Texas, where migrants face [brutal and dehumanizing conditions](#).

Lonsdale was deeply involved in supporting Trump's 2024 campaign, [leading fundraising outreach](#) at the Elon Musk-founded America PAC.

Cicero Institute's war on people experiencing homelessness

Lonsdale has also engineered a movement to [criminalize and punish homelessness](#) through the Cicero Institute, his policy influence organization. The Cicero Institute advocates draconian measures targeting unhoused people, pushing for fines of as much as \$5,000 for violating camping bans and defunding long-term “housing first” solutions in favor of punishment and incarceration, including making it easier to involuntarily commit unhoused people to psychiatric institutions.

In 2021, Lonsdale used [\\$40,000](#) of his own money along with research and talking points provided by the [Cicero Institute](#) to help pass a ballot measure in Austin banning sleeping outside just two years after the ban had been overturned. In 2025, Lonsdale bragged to Texas Monthly about passing the anti-homeless law ballot measure, saying: “we got people in Austin to vote against their own city council.” Just three weeks later, the Texas State Legislature passed a law [based on the Cicero Institute's bill templates](#) requiring every city in the state to [criminalize sleeping outside](#). Meanwhile, homelessness has continued to skyrocket in Austin as housing costs have become increasingly out of reach.

Following their big wins in Texas, Cicero Institute lobbyists, armed with Cicero Institute-generated research, have blanketed the United States, introducing anti-homeless laws in 21 states and passing them in 16, according to [the New York Times](#). From 2021 through 2024, the Cicero Institute [has reported spending](#) more than [\\$3.8 million on lobbying](#).

Lonsdale's statewide political spending prioritizes criminalization, education privatization

Since relocating to Austin, Lonsdale has made more than \$437,000 in Texas political donations, individually and through his company Lonsdale Enterprises, according to [campaign finance records](#).

The top target for Lonsdale's political spending in Texas so far has been [\\$210,000](#) to the Judicial Fairness PAC, a billionaire-backed PAC that used scaremongering about crime to [flip 23 seats](#) from Democratic to Republican control on Texas's appellate courts. However, [according to Texas Standard](#), the courts Lonsdale targeted do not preside over criminal cases, but do rule on cases that can impact big business.

After the Save Austin Now PAC, to whose homelessness criminalization campaign Lonsdale gave [\\$40,000](#) in 2021, his next top recipient was the Texas Federation for Children, a now-dissolved [arm of the DeVos family's American Federation for Children](#), which advocates using public school funds to issue vouchers to pay for tuition at private schools. According to Texas campaign finance records, Lonsdale gave \$30,000 to the Texas Federation for Children and an additional \$10,000 to the AFC Victory Fund, a super PAC [affiliated](#) with the American Federation for Children, in 2023.

According to [The Wall Street Journal](#), Lonsdale gave \$25,000 to Jeremy Sylestine's campaign for District Attorney against José Garza in 2024.

Beyond his campaign donations, Lonsdale has effected his takeover of Texas politics by cultivating revolving door relationships with the state Republican Party, including hiring the daughter of Governor Greg Abbott at 8VC. According to her [LinkedIn profile](#), Audrey Abbott began working at 8VC as an event coordinator in March 2022 and was promoted to events manager in January 2025.

TRAVIS KALANICK,

Uber, Atoms

Another new billionaire transplant to Austin is Travis Kalanick, the co-founder and former CEO of Uber. Kalanick, who is worth [\\$3.3 billion](#), resigned as Uber's CEO in 2017 after a slew of scandals surrounding his company leadership, and he left the board and sold off his Uber stock in 2019. More recently, Kalanick has tried to reinvent himself as the head of a new company, [Atoms](#), aiming to use robots and AI to automate things like logistics, mining, and food service.

Kalanick moved to Austin, Texas from San Francisco, California in December 2025 to avoid being taxed if California's proposed [billionaire wealth tax](#) — where a one-time five percent tax on the net worth of billionaires living in the state as of [January 1, 2026](#) would be imposed — passes in November 2026. "Just to be clear, on December 18, I moved to Texas," Kalanick said in an [interview](#), suggesting he moved to avoid the tax. "I don't know what's so specific about December 18, but let's just say it's prior to January," he added.

Kalanick has owned an Austin [lakehouse home](#) for years, and, in the interview, implied that his fellow billionaires fleeing to Florida should consider Texas instead. "I'm like, dude! Why so much Florida action? Come on, homies," he said. Recently, Kalanick has [bragged](#) that he now has a "5 minute jet ski commute" to his office across Lake Austin.

Toxic corporate culture

Kalanick is bringing a checkered history to Austin. In 2017, he was forced to [resign](#) as Uber's CEO after top shareholders revolted over numerous reports of the company's toxic culture. This included [accusations](#) of sexual harassment that were allegedly ignored by company leadership, and using software to secretly [help cars avoid](#) local authorities monitoring and regulating the company. Kalanick was also forced to apologize in 2017 for [throwing a tantrum](#) at an Uber driver.

Pioneering the anti-union gig worker economy

Kalanick and Uber also helped forge the exploitative "independent contractor" model that's dominant in app delivery services today. "Uber is built on a rocky foundation of swindling its own workers to make a buck," [wrote](#) the National Employment Law Project (NELP) in 2017, saying the company used the "manipulative, centuries-old tactic" of calling their workers "independent contractors" and denying them "employee" status. "Other companies engaged in app-based shopping, cleaning, delivery and care-giving soon adopted Uber's playbook," added NELP.

According to [The American Prospect](#), Uber's playbook of designating employees as independent contractors allowed the company to "[avoid paying minimum wages, overtime premiums, expense reimbursements, workers' compensation, health insurance, and numerous other statutory obligations. It also ma\[de\] it illegal for their workers to form a union.](#)"

Atoms aims to replace logistics, food production workers with AI

In Texas, Kalanick is focused on his [new company](#), Atoms, formally called City Storage Systems, which [aims to deploy](#) artificial intelligence and robots — what it calls "Industrial AI" — to physical tasks like logistics, food production, and mining. One outlet [referred](#) to Atoms' business model as in line with Kalanick's lifelong business strategy, as driven by a "single idea": that of "turning the physical world into something software can run."

DAVID SACKS,

Craft Ventures

Another new tech oligarch transplant to Texas is David Sacks, a major Silicon Valley investor leading figure of the tech oligarch class. Sacks is the [former](#) Chief Operating Officer of PayPal and a member of the “PayPal Mafia” group that included Elon Musk, Peter Thiel, and other tech tycoons. Sacks was an [early investor](#) in major tech companies such as Airbnb, Facebook, Palantir, Slack, SpaceX, and Uber, and in 2017, he [co-founded](#) the venture capital firm Craft Ventures.

Sacks, whose net worth “[has been reported to range from \\$250 million to \\$2 billion](#),” is no stranger to mind-boggling and ostentatious displays of billionaire wealth. Back in 2012, for example, he threw a Marie Antoinette-themed — of “Let Them Eat Cake” notoriety — [40th birthday bash](#) inside a \$125 million Los Angeles mansion.

Sacks announced in January 2026 that he had personally moved to Austin, Texas, “as a proposed wealth tax looms over California’s richest residents,” writes the [San Francisco Chronicle](#). Craft Ventures, which is based in San Francisco, also opened an office in Austin in December 2025.

Sacks made no secret of the motives behind his move, [posting](#) on January 1, 2026, that “[a] s a response to socialism, Miami will replace NYC as the finance capital and Austin will replace SF as the tech capital.” Sachs’ post [delighted](#) other tech elites including, former CEO of X Linda Yaccarino, the former CEO of X, who replied with a fire emoji.

Sacks has been an investor in companies mired in deep controversy, from Facebook (now Meta) to Palantir and beyond. He was an [early investor](#) in SpaceX — Elon Musk’s rocket company that has its imprint across Texas — and [Uber](#), Travis Kalanick’s former company that helped pioneer the exploitative “independent contractor” model for service apps.

Expanding crypto, AI, and data centers

But Sacks' influence goes well beyond his power as a billionaire investor. In December 2024, Trump named Sachs his "Crypto and AI czar," a new position as a special government employee to oversee the administration's crypto and AI policies. This came after the tech billionaire showered hundreds of millions of dollars towards Trump's 2024 reelection, with Sack's personally [hosting](#) a major Trump fundraiser at his own home in San Francisco.

As Trump's crypto and AI czar, Sacks oversaw and shaped policies — regulatory shifts, executive orders, and so on — that widely benefited his tech billionaire friends, as well as him personally. Among other things, the [New York Times](#) in November 2025 noted that "Mr. Sacks has positioned himself to personally benefit" because "[h]e has 708 tech investments, including at least 449 stakes in companies with ties to artificial intelligence that could be aided directly or indirectly by his policies."

He also championed policies to rapidly expand data centers across the country. In 2025, he co-wrote an "AI Action Plan" that called for "[streamlined permitting for data centers.](#)"

JOSEPH LIEMANDT,

Trilogy, ESW, Alpha School

Unlike the recent billionaire transplants in the rest of this piece, Joseph Liemandt, a longtime Texan worth [\\$7.6 billion](#), is a tech baron who has mostly stayed out of the public eye. But Liemandt is an influential figure in Texas and beyond, and also a big campaign donor.

A business built on exploiting workers

Liemandt was raking in hundreds of millions of dollars [by the 1990s](#) through his [Austin-based](#) company, Trilogy, which later [folded into](#) his investment firm, ESW Capital. His business model has been straightforward: [buying up](#) dozens of software companies and then hiring cheap freelance labor abroad to work for them. “In the past 12 years,” [Forbes](#) wrote in 2018, “ESW has quietly acquired some 75 software companies, mostly in the U.S., and it exports as many as 150 high-tech jobs every week.”

[Forbes](#) noted that Liemandt surveilled workers through having them install spyware on their computers that tracks their clicks and keyboard strokes and takes screenshots every ten minutes. ESW’s “contractors” have “no paid vacations, healthcare benefits or bonuses” and “use their own hardware,” wrote [Forbes](#).

Liemandt’s quest for cheap, exploitable labor with few rights mirrors others from the Texas oligarchic class, as does his company’s reputation for a toxic work culture, profiled by [Forbes](#), with a “testosterone-fueled work environment and an alcohol-infused mix of long hours, fast cars, gambling and sex.” Trilogy “wrote the bro code” that would infect Silicon Valley and make tech hostile for women,” added [Forbes](#).

Political giving to both Democrats and Republicans

Liemandt has donated to federal, state and local politics across the political aisle, from [Obama to Trump](#). During the current 2025-6 election cycle, he's donated [\\$100,000 each](#) both to hard-right Texas governor Greg Abbot as well ActBlue Texas, which raises money for Democratic candidates.

Since 2020 [in total](#), he's donated \$465,000 to ActBlue Texas, \$154,000 to GOP Texas House member [Ellen Troxclair](#), \$125,000 to Greg Abbott, \$10,000 to GOP Texas House member [Dustin Burrows](#), and \$9,606 to GOP Texas House member [Greg Bonnen](#).

He's also donated to a number of PACs, including \$121,316 to Stand Together Austin and \$50,000 to Save Austin Now PAC. The Save Austin Now donations came in 2021 during the anti-homeless [Proposition B ballot campaign](#) to criminalize homeless camps in Austin, and ESW Capital [Chief Financial Officer](#), Andrew Price, also gave [\\$50,000](#). Liemandt also gave \$50,000 in 2021 to Restore Leadership ATX, which [opposed](#) Proposition F in Austin, which [would've given](#) Austin's mayor more power. In 2024, he donated [\\$20,000](#) to Jeremy Sylestine, who was challenging José Garza for Travis County District Attorney.

AI-driven Alpha School, a top beneficiary of Texas' school voucher initiative

More recently, Liemandt has made headlines for a new project: the AI-driven K-12 private school chain, Alpha School, which is headquartered in Austin. He's [plunged \\$1 billion](#) into the chain, which claims it can teach students in just two hours a day. AI software teaches the lessons and teachers are referred to as "[guides](#)." Many state officials have raised concerns over the Alpha Schools model, calling it "[untested](#)" and "[experimental](#)."

Alpha has increasingly sought [public funds](#) for its expansion. Last year, it was rejected by the Texas State Board of Education when it sought to open as a publicly funded charter school. But an [investigation](#) by the Texas Tribune and ProPublica found that Alpha Schools has found a "[backdoor approach](#)" to accessing public funds by applying to the state's new school voucher initiative, which was pushed by billionaires including [Jeff Yass](#) and [Betsy DeVos](#), as well as Alpha School's [founders](#). According to [ProPublica](#), Alpha has more than 30 virtual and in-person campuses in Texas, most of which were accepted into the voucher program, making it one of the largest private school chains participating in the initiative. Alpha Schools did not have to meet any [state curriculum standards](#) or prove the AI-model would lead to student success in order to join the voucher program.

School voucher programs [siphon resources away from public schools](#). Numerous studies have found that voucher programs [do not improve student achievement](#). In Austin, ten public schools were [closed](#) last year despite community calls for them to remain open and the school district is facing [\\$205 million](#) in budget cuts this year.

JOE GEBBIA,

Airbnb

Airbnb co-founder and [board member](#) Joe Gebbia is worth [\\$9.3 billion](#). A close friend of [Elon Musk](#) and board member at [Tesla](#), he was part of the group of tech billionaires who left California for Texas in 2020, seeking lower taxes and less business regulations. He moved into a [\\$10 million mansion in Austin](#). Two years later, he purchased a minority stake in the [San Antonio Spurs](#). When he was inducted to the Texas Business Hall of Fame just four years after arriving in the state, he [said](#): “You don’t move into Texas, Texas moves into you.” Since moving to Texas, he has been a major backer of Governor Greg Abbott, donating [\\$2.5 million](#) to him, including \$1 million from a [mysterious trust](#). He is also a co-owner of the [luxury restaurant](#) Austin Sports Club.

Gebbia also has a close relationship to Trump. Trump appointed him the first U.S. “[Chief Design Officer](#)” to overhaul U.S. government websites.

Gebbia has expressed anti-immigrant views, claiming that an anti-immigrant speech by JD Vance was a “[powerful message](#)” and retweeting a social media post that claimed [immigration was driving up housing prices in Canada and Australia](#).

Fueling the affordable housing crisis

Gebbia co-founded [Airbnb](#), and while no longer serving in an executive capacity, he continues to steer operations as a member of the board. While the company makes [billion-dollar profits](#), housing justice advocates [around the world](#) argue that Airbnb is fueling a housing affordability crisis. Called the “[Airbnb effect](#),” the result of Airbnb’s success typically coincides with longtime residents being pushed out of their communities as Airbnb listings in cities frequently lead to [higher rental and housing prices](#). “The Airbnb Effect” has been shown to disproportionately impact housing stability for [Black communities](#) in particular.

Texans are facing an [affordable housing crisis](#). Only [26 homes](#) are affordable and available for every 100 extremely low-income households that need one. According to a 2024 study, [52%](#) of Austin renters spent more than 30% of their income on housing costs. And 60% of Texas renters said in a recent poll that the cost of housing is a [major problem](#) where they live.

DOGE cuts endangered Texans impacted by floods and leave the state's residents vulnerable to extreme weather disasters

In February 2025, Gebbia joined fellow Texas billionaire Elon Musk's [Department of Government Efficiency \(DOGE\)](#), the agency responsible for pushing [260,000 federal workers](#) out of their jobs. These workers served veterans, seniors, and farmers, and were responsible for keeping food, water, airlines, and national parks safe. Among its [many destructive policies](#), DOGE dismantled agencies that execute critical emergency response and disaster relief. For Texans, this brought dangerous impacts when [devastating, deadly floods](#) hit the state in the summer of 2025. A former administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration stated that some Texans in the floodpath [didn't receive severe weather alerts](#) as a result of DOGE cuts.

DOGE cuts to [Federal Emergency Management Agency \(FEMA\)](#) also endanger Texans. The state is vulnerable to [extreme weather](#), like hurricanes and wildfires, that is intensifying due to climate change. From 2020 to 2024, Texas experienced [68 billion-dollar disasters](#), including severe storms, droughts, floods, wildfires, and severe cold. Florida ranked second on the list with 34 disasters in the same period. DOGE [cuts to programs including FEMA disaster aid, flood prevention projects, and companion assistance for homes damaged in extreme weather disasters](#) will leave Texans vulnerable in the wake of disaster.

LUKE NOSEK,

Gigafund

Luke Nosek, net worth [\\$5.5 billion](#), is a co-founder of PayPal and a member of the infamous tech oligarch “PayPal mafia,” along with fellow billionaires Peter Thiel — the Palantir founder who famously [wrote](#), “I no longer believe that freedom and democracy are compatible” — and Elon Musk. After leaving PayPal, he went on to co-found the venture capital fund Founders Fund alongside Thiel, investing in companies including [Palantir](#) i.e. the “[corporate backbone](#)” of ICE, and [Flock Safety](#), the surveillance corporation that has been criticized for [privacy concerns](#) and [police misuse](#) of data. Now, he is a [cofounder and partner](#) at the Austin-based venture capital firm Gigafund. The firm’s investments include: an [AI engineering training school](#), a [gig work platform for warehouse and manufacturing workers](#), and Neuralink, Elon Musk’s brain computer company that has prompted concerns about its potential for [mind control](#).

Nosek and his wife, Nicole, who runs the housing advocacy group [Texans for Reasonable Solutions](#), reportedly moved from Silicon Valley to Austin in [2019](#), settling in a [mansion in West Lake Hills](#). They host semisecret salons for tech executives in Austin. A *Texas Monthly* [article](#) described one salon, saying:

This fete was by invitation only—the location wasn’t announced until the day of—and the topic was “whether we’re approaching the end of western civilization . . . or just the beginning.”...Among the guests were 23andMe cofounder Linda Avey; Chris Bosh, the Dallas native and NBA Hall of Famer now living in the Austin area; and journalist Sewell Chan, then the editor of The Texas Tribune. “And then it was like a clown car of twenty or twenty-five VC guys, Tesla guys, tech-med guys,” one guest, an Austin fixture, told me. Not much was settled about the end of civilization, except that Luke Nosek and many of his guests seemed to think it was coming soon. “Basically, all of those guys were like, ‘We need to burn it down,’” the guest told me. That decided, the party broke up. “We had to be out of the house by eleven because Elon was coming.”

Spending hundreds of thousands of dollars to shape state and local politics

Since 2022, the Noseks have spent over [\\$850,000](#) to shape Texas state politics, including \$450,000 to Nicole’s organization Texans for Reasonable Solutions and \$124,000 to Texas Senate Leadership Fund, Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick’s [committee](#) to support the Senate’s conservative majority. They also [contributed](#):

- \$31,500 to Defend Rural Texas PAC, a [pro-public education committee](#)
- \$25,000 to Stand Together Austin, a [pro-Kirk Watson committee](#)
- \$15,000 to Judicial Fairness PAC, a [committee focused on electing pro-business judges](#)
- \$10,285 to Vibrant Austin PAC, an [urbanist committee that has targeted Austin city council races](#)
- \$10,000 to Texans for Lawsuit Reform PAC, a committee focused on making [Texas’ legal system friendly to big business](#)

SpaceX reaps massive tax breaks

Nosek became a billionaire thanks to his [SpaceX stock](#) and remains a [board member](#) of SpaceX. The company has received massive tax breaks in Texas, including a recent [100% property tax abatement](#) from Grimes County and a [\\$30 million grant](#) from the state for its Terafab semiconductor chip manufacturing facility. Meanwhile, Texans face [major budget shortfalls](#) forcing layoffs and cuts to public services like parks, libraries, and housing

Advocating for YIMBY housing policy

Nosek's wife, Nicole, is the founder and Chair of [Texans for Reasonable Solutions](#), a Yes in My Backyard (YIMBY) housing group that [pushed state lawmakers](#) to pass legislation they say will make it easier to build housing. Together, the Noseks have donated over [\\$450,000](#) to the groups' political action committee. Housing [justice advocates](#) and [critics](#) of YIMBY policies [argue](#) that YIMBY policies like those championed by Texans for Reasonable Solutions fuel gentrification and fail to address root causes of the housing crisis, including the role of corporate landlords in enacting massive rent hikes and replacing rent-controlled housing with luxury development.

Texans for Reasonable Solutions' work has been [praised](#) by the rightwing, [billionaire-backed](#) public policy thinktank the Manhattan Institute. On a 2025 episode of the Manhattan Institute's [podcast](#), Nicole Nosek talked about her ideas for housing policy with [Judge Glock](#), current director of research at the Manhattan Institute and former senior director of policy and research at the Cicero Institute, big tech billionaire Joe Lonsdale's think tank that advocates for policies that [criminalize homelessness](#).

CONCLUSION

Texans are fighting back against Big Tech's takeover of their state

As billionaires continue their Texas takeover and run roughshod over the communities across the Lone Star State, there is hope on the horizon. While American tech oligarchs like the ones profiled here become richer and more emboldened in their ambitions to gain control over all of our lives, they have also become some of the most unpopular figures in the U.S. – bringing people together across the political aisle. A recent Gallup [poll](#) found that 7 in 10 Americans from across the political spectrum oppose the construction of data centers. A Harris [poll](#) found that over half of Americans consider billionaires a threat to democracy (up 7% from a year prior) and want to see a cap on wealth accumulation.

In response to historic [cuts](#) to public services under Trump, many states have [proposed](#) a tax on the ultra-wealthy as a politically popular solution. In Texas, people are fighting back against Big Tech billionaire influence by [banning data centers](#), [pushing for humane housing and homelessness policies](#), and calling for an end to [unaccountable AI-surveillance technologies](#). In the coming years, it will be essential for Texans to continue to expose Big Tech billionaires' influence over Texas state politics in order to ensure the state works for all people, not just billionaires.

Note on campaign finance methodology

The majority of campaign finance data in this report comes from <https://www.transparencyusa.org/tx> and covers what is available on the site from 2015 to September 11, 2026.