

House Majority PAC

What Donors Need to Know

Democratic operative Ali Lapp launched the House Majority PAC (HMP) in 2011, looking to counter the explosion of conservative super PAC spending that helped [sink Democratic House members](#) in the 2010 midterms. In its early years, the super PAC had to withstand several rounds of disappointing election nights, battling back the Tea Party wave that helped Republicans secure control of the House for eight years. Riding a surge of donations and attention after the election of Donald Trump, HMP helped secure a Democratic majority in 2018, which was narrowly maintained in 2020.

HMP is part of the Democratic Party's now sizable stable of super PACs and dark money outfits helping coordinate millions of dollars in donations and ad buys each election cycle. The bulk of its funding comes from mega-donors, and HMP has been a favorite place to give for many of the Democrats' richest allies. Like other national electoral groups, HMP's track record has been mixed, with successes and failures often hinging on trends or structural factors outside of the super PAC's control. However, a more detailed analysis of HMP's strategies and leadership raises questions about the organization's competence and effectiveness.

In the following brief, Blue Tent advises donors to merely **consider** giving to HMP, which we likewise rate as a **low priority** due to its reliable stable of big money donors. ([Explore our methodology](#).) Small and mid-level donors should instead favor direct contributions to candidates and/or grassroots organizations, where their money can have a greater impact. This brief is based on independent research and reporting, including conversations with progressive strategists and experts. House Majority PAC did not respond to multiple requests for comment from Blue Tent.

What are its core strategies?

HMP spends most of its money on media, primarily opposing Republican candidates. As the super PAC has grown in tandem with the Democrats' outside money network, it has increased its contributions to affiliates. Here are HMP's top strategies:

Opposition media. The majority of HMP's outside spending goes toward media opposing conservatives. Nearly all of HMP's independent expenditures run through liberal consultancy and ad producer firm Waterfront Strategies. The firm works with many other liberal super PACs as

well, including [Women Vote!](#) and the Senate Majority PAC. HMP has worked closely with Waterfront since its inception.

Transfers to allies. HMP became a “Carey Committee” in this most recent cycle, meaning it is now a hybrid of a traditional PAC and a super PAC, allowing it to make transfers directly to campaigns—with a spending limit—while remaining unlimited in its outside spending in support of candidates. In 2020, HMP made around 250 distributions, most of them of \$5,000 or \$2,500, to various Democrats running for Congress. In the last two cycles, the super PAC also routinely made transfers to other liberal super PACs, most notably WomenVote! and VoteVets.

Expanding into dark money. In 2019, HMP established its affiliated 501(c)(4) group, House Majority Forward, which is not required to disclose its donors. HMF [funded ads supporting Democrat Dan McCready in a special election in North Carolina](#). Throughout the rest of the cycle, the nonprofit routed nearly \$8 million in dark money to HMP. It also took in \$500,000 from noted liberal dark money group Sixteen Thirty Fund.

How effectively is it pursuing its core strategies?

According to the Center for Responsive Politics’ success metrics, HMP has had both high rates of success and failure depending on the year. The following numbers, calculated by OpenSecrets.org, show the percentage of HMP’s money that either supported winning candidates or opposed losing candidates in a given year:

- **2012:** 67.1%
- **2014:** 46.7%
- **2016:** 30.9%
- **2018:** 82%
- **2020:** 18.3%

Digging into the numbers further, HMP’s huge dropoff in success from 2018 to 2020 becomes even more stark. In 2018, of the 26 Republican candidates on whom HMP spent at least \$1 million opposing, all but three lost their races, and the most spent on any one candidate was \$3.2 million. In 2020, HMP spent at least \$4 million opposing candidates in seven separate races, all of which were won by Republicans. Of the 38 races where the super PAC spent between \$1 million and \$4 million, Democrats won only nine seats.

Additionally, for all but one of the Republicans on whom HMP spent at least \$3 million opposing, the super PAC did not start its media buys until September (the one exception was a race it started spending on in August). Late TV spending is a common tactic for campaigns and outside spenders, built on the assumption that most voters only start engaging with politics in the last few weeks before Election Day. But ad experts who spoke with Blue Tent said that logic is changing as voters have become more saturated with different media, requiring campaigns to invest earlier in more consistent media that establishes a relationship with targeted voters. (See Blue Tent’s background brief: [Political Advertising: What Donors Need to Know](#).)

One factor in HMP’s low success rate in 2020 is that the super PAC raised and spent significantly more money (roughly \$160 million, according to the Center for Responsive Politics) than in 2018 (\$95.6 million). HMP had more to spend in 2020, giving it wiggle room to invest in a larger number of less winnable races than in 2018.

However, the comparison between the two election cycles is too stark to be dismissed, particularly with regard to the sums pumped late into races that Democrats would go on to lose. The *Washington Post* [reported](#) shortly after election night in 2018 that while many Democrats had significantly outraised their Republican opponents, more than half of those candidates lost anyway. Center for Responsive Politics Executive Director Sheila Krumholz told the Post at the time that “at some threshold, it no longer is so much about the money as it is about strategy, messaging, connection [with voters], charisma and organization.” The same can be said of HMP, whose influx of late money into certain races likely went to waste, raising questions about the effectiveness of Waterfront’s media strategy and messaging.

In April of 2021, Priorities USA Action, the liberal super PAC that supports the Democratic presidential nominee each cycle, [released a memo](#) analyzing the Democrats’ spending from 2020. While the memo did not explicitly call out HMP, it did find that Democratic spending on House races was generally inefficient. The analysis found these campaigns focused too heavily on traditional media and neglected digital media, while 75% of House TV ads were aired outside of the districts the ad was intended to target.

Additionally, since the pandemic led many people to vote early by mail, many of the late TV ads were reaching people who had already voted—roughly 10% of the Democrats’ ad budget targeted those voters, the memo found. The Priorities memo went on to recommend that future campaigns

invest in ad buys earlier in the year, reinforcing the strategy Blue Tent has heard repeatedly from ad experts.

What is its track record of achieving its goals?

After HMP's founding in 2011, Democrats would not retake the House for three more election cycles with many pundits arguing the party has underperformed relative to expectations.

But a variety of factors outside of campaign strategy may have prevented Democrats from winning the House in the past decade, including gerrymandering, voter suppression and “wave elections” that have become common in midterms. Although Democrats gained seats in 2012—the first election year HMP was in operation—Republicans retained control of the chamber, expanding their majority in 2014 to the largest margin for its party since 1929. Democrats gained seats in 2016, but it wasn't until the 2018 midterms that the party finally flipped the House. Expected to ride a second “blue wave” in 2020, Democrats actually lost seats that year but maintained control of the chamber.

Does it have strong leadership and governance?

HMP's current president is Robby Mook, who has been in the role since 2019. Mook is best known as campaign manager for Hillary Clinton's failed 2016 presidential campaign, which infamously neglected to focus resources in key states. Mook was also a senior adviser to Clinton's failed 2008 presidential campaign, and managed Terry McAuliffe's victorious 2012 campaign for governor of Virginia. Mook joined HMP only after Democrats reclaimed the House in the 2018 midterms and oversaw a decline in the party's majority in 2020. The *Washington Post* [reported earlier this year](#) that Mook is taking a year of leave from the super PAC to serve in the military, and The Intercept reported that founder Ali Lapp will fill in while he's away.

Lapp is a former lobbyist and Democratic operative, working previously in high levels of the DCCC, including during the 2006 midterms when Democrats took control of the House. Lapp served as HMP's president from its founding until 2019, when Mook was named president and she stayed on as a senior adviser. It's unclear who will be steering the ship once primaries begin next year. Additionally, the Post reported House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's chief fundraiser Mike Smith joined HMP to head its fundraising operations. This is consistent with the HMP's history of cycling high-level Democrats into key roles. Much of the super PAC's other top leadership consists of former DCCC staffers and other alums of various party offices and liberal organizations.

Is its staff diverse and culturally competent?

Democracy in Color, a progressive political media group, ran a survey-based analysis of several of the leading liberal super PACs in 2020, grading each on their transparency, efficiency and efforts to reach voters of color. While the organization graded HMP's transparency a "B-," HMP's demographic targeting was graded a "C," indicating the super PAC had room for improvement in terms of the voters it tries to reach.

In an April 2021 investigation of the [consultant pipeline](#) within the Democratic Party, the Intercept found that the Democratic Party apparatus struggled to promote and trust consultants of color. HMP spokesperson Caitlin Legacki told The Intercept that the group's leaders "agree that it is important to have vendors who understand the communities we are trying to reach," but that the organization also must account for other factors, like a firm's bandwidth, expertise and track record.

What kinds of donors support it?

HMP attracts major donations from the liberal mega-donor class, several of whom made names for themselves by becoming regular multi-million-dollar donors to the super PAC. In 2012, the first election year HMP was in operation, Chicago's Fred Eychaner gave \$4.25 million, Renaissance Technologies' James Simons gave \$1.6 million, and Donald Sussman gave \$1.15 million. All of them would continue to give comparable amounts each following cycle. Other major donors include Michael Bloomberg, who made his first major contribution to the super PAC in 2014 and made the two largest individual donations in HMP history in 2020 with \$12.75 million and \$10 million, respectively. In total, he gave \$25.6 million during the cycle.

The super PAC also regularly takes in significant contributions from labor unions. Over the last decade, it's received millions of dollars from the Carpenters and Joiners Union, the Laborers Union and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, as well as smaller totals from a variety of unions like the Service Employees International Union and the American Federation of Teachers.

2020 was the first cycle HMP had its own 501(c)(4) arm, [House Majority Forward](#), which became another source of dark money for the party. In addition to [spending around \\$1 million](#) on a North Carolina House race, according to OpenSecrets, House Majority Forward also moved nearly \$8 million to HMP.

How transparent is it about its spending, results, and learning from its mistakes?

The formation of House Majority Forward indicates that HMP is trending toward more dark money, as has been the case for much of the liberal outside funding apparatus since 2018. As a super PAC, HMP's spending numbers are largely public, but the source of its money has become more opaque.

As for its ability to self-reflect, there have been few indications HMP is making significant changes since the disappointing results of 2020. Pundits and party leaders have been [arguing in the press](#) since Election Day about why the Democrats lost seats, with centrists blaming radical messaging for turning away moderate voters and progressives blaming the party's strategy and minimal focus on building on-the-ground capacity.

HMP has not released any official statements on its website since Election Day 2020, and it's unclear at this point what specific staffing or strategy changes the organization will make ahead of the 2022 midterms.

Does it have clear and realistic plans for the future?

While there hasn't yet been any public reporting about HMP's strategy going forward, the 2022 elections are already on track to be one of the most expensive midterms in history. As the [New York Times](#) reported in October 2021, combined Democratic and Republican fundraising for House races is exceeding totals from the same point during the 2020 cycle, with a combined \$128 million in the bank between the two parties.

Conclusion

As with most top-level liberal organizations, HMP's challenges for the future mirror those of the Democratic Party at large. The organization has proven it can raise all the money it needs, but the challenge now is deploying those resources to maximum effect to win elections and hold power in Congress. HMP has shown an ability to ride Democratic wave elections, but its dismal investments during Republican waves and presidential election years serve to erase many of those accomplishments. Further, the organization's leadership and hiring decisions reflect a willingness to tolerate mediocrity among fellow Democratic insiders. Given Mook's key role in managing Hillary Clinton's disastrous 2016 campaign, his hiring by HMP was head-scratching even at the time. After the super PAC's late giving strategy failed in 2020, the decision to hire and retain Mook is even more baffling, with HMP's unwillingness to clean house raising serious red flags.

For these reasons, Blue Tent advises donors to only **consider** donating to House Majority PAC, which should also be considered a **low priority** given HMP's ability to consistently raise huge sums of money from wealthy donors. ([Explore our methodology.](#)) House Democrats are facing a difficult election map in 2022, and will likely be matched nearly dollar for dollar in funds by Republicans. For small and mid-level donors, giving directly to House candidates and/or groups engaged in grassroots organizing is a much better investment with a higher likelihood for impact.

You may also want to check out:

- [American Bridge 21st Century PAC: What Donors Need to Know](#)
- [Future Forward PAC: What Donors Need to Know](#)
- [Priorities USA: What Donors Need to Know](#)
- [BlackPAC: What Donors Need to Know](#)

