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At Secretive Meeting, Tech CEOs And Top Republicans Commiserate, Plot To Stop Trump

Karl Rove shared focus group findings that give hope to the GOP establishment.

🕒 03/07/2016 07:22 pm ET | Updated 2 hours ago

10 K



Ryan Grim

Washington bureau chief for The Huffington Post



Nick Baumann

Senior Enterprise Editor, The Huffington Post



Matt Fuller

Congressional Reporter, The Huffington Post



SEAISLAND.COM

Described unimaginatively but accurately as "opulent," Sea Island, Georgia, hosted a gaggle of Republican leaders and tech CEOs for the American Enterprise Institute's annual World Forum.



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Billionaires, tech CEOs and top members of the Republican establishment flew to a private island resort off the coast of Georgia this weekend for the American Enterprise Institute's annual World Forum, according to sources familiar with the secretive gathering.

The main topic at the closed-to-the-press confab? How to stop Republican front-

runner Donald Trump.

Apple CEO Tim Cook, Google co-founder Larry Page, Napster creator and Facebook investor Sean Parker, and Tesla Motors and SpaceX honcho Elon Musk all attended. So did Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.), political guru Karl Rove, House Speaker Paul Ryan, GOP Sens. Tom Cotton (Ark.), Cory Gardner (Colo.), Tim Scott (S.C.), Rob Portman (Ohio) and Ben Sasse (Neb.), who recently made news by [saying](#) he "cannot support Donald Trump."

Along with Ryan, the House was represented by Energy and Commerce Committee Chair Fred Upton (Mich.), Rep. Kevin Brady (Texas) and almost-Speaker Kevin McCarthy (Calif.), sources said, along with leadership figure Cathy McMorris Rodgers (Wash.), Budget Committee Chairman Tom Price (R-Ga.), Financial Services Committee Chairman Jeb Hensarling (Texas) and Diane Black (Tenn.).

[Philip Anschutz](#), the billionaire GOP donor whose company owns a stake in Sea Island, was also there, along with Democratic Rep. John Delaney, who represents Maryland. Arthur Sulzberger, the publisher of The New York Times, was there, too, a Times spokeswoman confirmed.

"A specter was haunting the World Forum--the specter of Donald Trump," Kristol wrote in an emailed report from the conference, borrowing the opening lines of the Communist Manifesto. "There was much unhappiness about his emergence, a good deal of talk, some of it insightful and thoughtful, about why he's done so well, and many expressions of hope that he would be defeated."



Bill Kristol 
@BillKristol



Heading to AEI World Forum. Lots of interesting guests. It's off the record, so please do consider my tweets from there off the record!

6:20 PM - 3 Mar 2016

 11  43

"The key task now, to once again paraphrase Karl Marx, is less to understand Trump than to stop him," Kristol wrote. "In general, there's a little too much hand-wringing, brow-furrowing, and fatalism out there and not quite enough resolving to save the party from nominating or the country electing someone who simply shouldn't be president."

A highlight of the gathering was a presentation by Rove about focus group findings on Trump. The business mogul's greatest weakness, according to Rove, was that voters have a very hard time envisioning him as "presidential" and as somebody their children should look up to. They also see him as somebody who can be erratic and shouldn't have his [\(small\) fingers](#) anywhere near a nuclear trigger.

Sources familiar with the meeting -- who requested anonymity because the forum is off the record -- said that much of the conversation around Trump centered on "how

— HAPPENING SOON —

March 8

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RACE	DEMOCRATS	REPUBLICANS																								
Hawaii	No results yet Preview »																									
Idaho	No results yet Preview »																									
Michigan	<table><tr><th colspan="2">Poll Average (%)</th></tr><tr><td>Clinton</td><td>57</td></tr><tr><td>Sanders</td><td>39</td></tr><tr><td colspan="2">Source: Pollster</td></tr><tr><td colspan="2">Preview »</td></tr></table>	Poll Average (%)		Clinton	57	Sanders	39	Source: Pollster		Preview »		<table><tr><th colspan="2">Poll Average (%)</th></tr><tr><td>Trump</td><td>39</td></tr><tr><td>Cruz</td><td>21</td></tr><tr><td>Kasich</td><td>19</td></tr><tr><td>Rubio</td><td>14</td></tr><tr><td colspan="2">Source: Pollster</td></tr><tr><td colspan="2">Preview »</td></tr></table>	Poll Average (%)		Trump	39	Cruz	21	Kasich	19	Rubio	14	Source: Pollster		Preview »	
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Clinton	57																									
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Mississippi	No results yet Preview »	No results yet Preview »																								

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this happened, rather than how are we going to stop him," as one person put it.

Trump, who already has nearly one-third of the delegates he needs to secure the GOP nomination, faces major tests in the Florida and Ohio primaries next week. If he wins both those states, he will need to win just half of the remaining delegates to secure the nomination.

He wasn't the only topic of the wide-ranging conference, however. At one point, Cotton and Apple's Cook fiercely debated cell phone encryption, a source familiar with the exchange told HuffPost. "Cotton was pretty harsh on Cook," the source said, and "everyone was a little uncomfortable about how hostile Cotton was." (Apple is in the midst of a battle with the Justice Department and the FBI over an encrypted iPhone that belonged to one of the San Bernardino shooters.) Cook did not attend the Rove session, or otherwise take part in any political organizing, emphasized a source close to Cook.

AEI has held the annual forum on Sea Island for years. It's so secret that in 2015, Bloomberg News complained that no one would even say whether it had snowed.

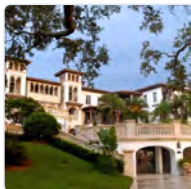
Federal Aviation Administration records available on FlightAware.com show that a fleet of private jets flew into and out of two small airports near Sea Island this weekend. Fifty-four planes flew out of the airport on St. Simons Island, Georgia, on Sunday -- nearly four times as many as departed from the airport the previous Sunday.


Darlene Bearden
 @darlenebearden



Well, I guess the main part is over. large loud jets are taking off one right after the other fb.me/Qv1icoC0

8:05 PM - 5 Mar 2016



AEI's World Forum: So Secretive We Could...
 At the Georgia resort, 2016 Republican hopefuls can meet the people who may bankroll them or shape their ideas away from the scrutiny of the bloomberg.com


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Many of the planes are registered to jet-sharing companies such as NetJets and Flexjet or private jet services companies such as Jetsetter. At least two of them flew directly to San Jose, California, home of many tech giants, on Sunday.

Another plane, which arrived from Eaton, Colorado, on Wednesday and flew back there on Sunday, is registered to Monfort Aviation, LLC, a private, tax-exempt trust. FAA records don't indicate who controls Monfort Aviation, but it shares a name with Dick and Charlie Monfort, the Colorado-based heirs to a meatpacking fortune who now own the Colorado Rockies baseball team. The plane, a Raytheon Hawker 800XP, seats 15 people. Anschutz, the billionaire whose company part owns Sea

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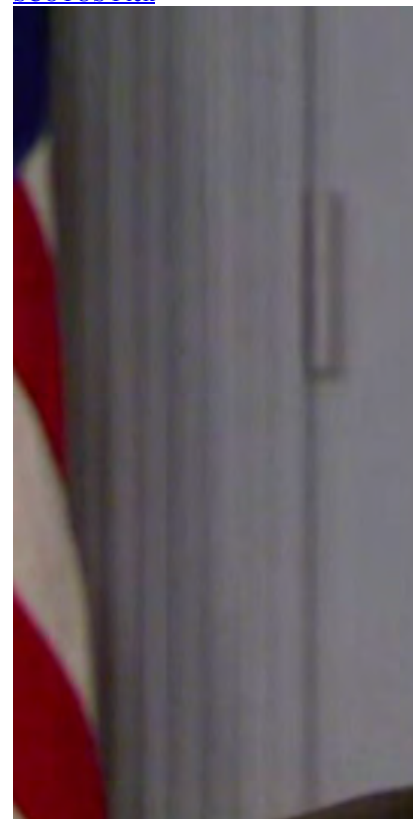
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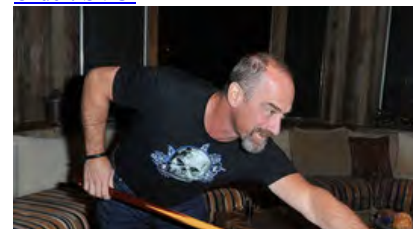
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Island, is also from Colorado.

Another private plane, a Canadair Challenger, [flew cross-country](#) from St. Simons to Van Nuys Airport in Southern California on Friday. Van Nuys Airport is so associated with millionaires and billionaires that their disputes over space at the field [occasionally spill into the news media](#).

Another plane, a tri-jet Dassault Falcon 900, flew into St. Simons on Thursday from Westchester County, New York, and returned on Sunday. It's [registered](#) to Northwood Investors LLC, which is run by John Kukral, whose official bio [notes](#) he's been involved in real estate deals worth over \$40 billion.

"The event is private and off-the record, therefore we do not comment further on the content or attendees," said Judy Stecker, a spokeswoman for AEI. She described the forum as "an informal gathering of leading thinkers from all ideological backgrounds to discuss challenges that the United States and the free world face in economics, security and social welfare."



DAVID BOHRER/ASSOCIATED PRESS/THE WHITE HOUSE

Former Vice President Dick Cheney participates in a ribbon-cutting ceremony at the 26th annual AEI World Forum in 2007. Conceived by former President Gerald Ford, the forum attracts political and economic leaders from around the world.

Sea Island Resort -- which boasts three golf courses and a spa and fitness center that, at 65,000 square feet, would fill nearly two-thirds of a Home Depot -- is famous for its isolation. It's surrounded by marshes and some distance from the nearest large commercial airports. In 2004, when President George W. Bush hosted the annual G-8 summit on the island, the press center for the event [was located 80 miles away](#) in Savannah, Georgia.

The Anschutz Corp., Starwood Capital Group Global, Avenue Capital Group, and

[Senator Over Encryption At Secretive Retreat](#)



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Oaktree Capital Management [bought the then-bankrupt resort](#) -- which covers the entire island -- in 2010 for \$212.4 million.

"It is not much of a place to experience average America," The New York Times [wrote](#) of Sea Island in 2004. "But it is a fine locale to shut out the rest of the world, view conspicuous architectural consumption and walk beaches that have little or no public access."

In 2015, AEI's Sea Island gala drew most of the men who would become the Republican party's presidential candidates, according to [an agenda](#) Bloomberg obtained at the time. Scheduled speakers included former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, Texas Sen. Ted Cruz, South Carolina Sen. Lindsey Graham, Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal, and former Pennsylvania Sen. Rick Santorum. (Some scheduled speakers may not have attended; a snowstorm snarled transportation up and down the East Coast that weekend.)

AEI paid \$32,490.97 for 11 members of Congress to attend the conference in 2015 alone, according to [disclosure records available on Legistorm.com](#).

Democratic officials, including Sen. Cory Booker (D-N.J.), Jason Furman, the chair of Barack Obama's Council of Economic Advisers, Gene Sperling, another top Obama economic adviser, and former Treasury Secretary Larry Summers, were listed as 2015 attendees, Bloomberg [reported](#) at the time.

Christie was scheduled to deliver the opening remarks at the conference that year.

A few weeks ago, he endorsed Trump.

CORRECTION: This article has been edited to remove a reference to Politico publisher Robert Allbritton, who said he's never attended an AEI World Forum.

Jennifer Bendery contributed reporting.

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Participants in the March 5-6, 2016 secretive American Enterprise Institute's (AEI) annual World Forum where the participants plotted how to stop Donald Trump. Source : *The Huffington Post* .

		Political Beneficiaries Whose voices govern? <i>We The People</i> or Donors & Thieves?																	
		IBM Eclipse Foundation / Leader Technologies' social networking invention thief / NSA spy state cony	Tom Cotton	Ben Sasse	Cory Gardner	Paul Ryan	Mitch McConnell	Tim Scott	Rob Portman	Fred Upton	Kevin McCarthy	Cathy McMorris Rodgers	Tom Price	Jeb Hensarling	Diane Black	John Delaney	Subtotals		
Donors	Senate		X	X	X		X	X	X										
	House					X				X	X	X	X	X	X	X			
	Party		R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	D			
	State		AR	NE	CO	WI	KY	SC	OH	MI	CA	WA	GA	TX	TN	MD			
by Industry																			
KPMG LLP	Audit	X	\$10,400			\$6,000	\$7,400				\$11,250		\$6,500	\$10,500				\$52,050	
McKinsey & Co	Audit	X	31 000	38 450			5 200		5 200									79 850	
Bank of America	Finance	X	10,000	10,600		11,200	18,650	10,200			15,200			12,250				88,100	
Berkshire Hathaway	Finance	X		22,750	9,500	10,500	22,400	10,000		10,500	10,000	10,000						105,650	
BlackRock Inc	Finance	X			2,600	12,600	10,500	2,500			5,000			10,000				43,200	
Blackstone Group	Finance	X	12,800		14,300	7,700	175,300	17,300	7,500	5,000	7,700							247,600	
Capital Group Companies	Finance			2,600	6,500	1,000	17,700	10,400	20,400		20,600					10,000		89,200	
Citadel LLC	Finance		35,050	2,600	5,200		2,500	2,600										47,950	
Citigroup Inc	Finance	X	9 500	6 000	11 000	16 300	11 900	7 500	102 950		10 000	6 000		10 000				191 150	
Credit Suisse Group	Finance	X	7,500		7,000	14,000	15,300				5,500			10,100				59,400	
Crow Holdings	Finance		31,400	5,200	20,800		5,200											62,600	
Deutsche Bank AG	Finance	X	2,500			1,250	13,600	3,600	16,000		1,000		500	3,500				41,950	
Elliott Management	Finance	X	143,100	10,400	53,700	5,200	59,800	42,850	10,200		5,200	5,200						335,650	
Goldman Sachs	Finance	X	99,049	6,500	6,300		115,825	38,550	7,600		35,550		8,500	27,300				345,174	
HSBC Holdings	Finance	X				2,000	10,000					1,000						13,000	
JPMorgan Chase & Co	Finance	X	6,500		5,500	8,000	35,575	6,500	7,600		12,600	7,500	6,000	30,950	18,700	19,700		165,125	
KKR & Co	Finance	X	7,500			7,500	17,600		56,755									89,355	
Morgan Stanley	Finance	X				12 850	34 400						15 700	6 500				69 450	
Stephens Group	Finance		105,550		5,600		21,700											132,850	
UBS AG	Finance	X				11,250	84,500	11,000	14,000	10,000	10,000	11,500	10,250	12,000				174,500	
Vanguard Group	Finance	X				4,000	5,000		4,000		1,000			5,000		4,000		23,000	
Wells Fargo	Finance	X	24,572	8,132	18,705	17,900	19,150	19,020			41,850	12,500		11,000		6,500		179,329	
Koch Industries	Industrial		25,800	10,000	31,800	20,400	10,400	30,800		11,000	10,000		10,000	10,000	10,000			180,200	
Akin Gump Et Al	Law	X				7,850	15,900			12,750	12,350			17,800				66,650	
Alston & Bird LLP	Law	X	2 000	7 600		10 000	7 000		10 000	2 000					7 000			45 600	
Arent Fox LLP	Law	X			1,750	2,500	9,600			4,000	1,250					3,100		22,200	
Gibson Dunn & Crutcher LLP	Law	X	41,900		750	8,200	3,250	1,000	8,700		12,900			2,500				79,200	
Kirkland & Ellis LLP	Law	X	27,800	1,500	1,950		10,900	1,500	2,450									46,100	
Skadden Arps LLP	Law	X	3,000				10,650	2,600	1,250		17,200					13,400		48,100	
Sullivan & Cromwell LLP	Law	X	2,250	2,000	1,500	750	5,450	500			1,000							13,450	
Citizens for Prosperity in America Today	PAC		31,299	10,000	10,000		11,123	10,000	10,000									82,422	
Club for Growth	PAC		505 174	294 987	97 552		44 451	1 400										943 564	
Senate Conservatives Fund	PAC		97,427	158,729														256,156	
Facebook Inc	Technology	X	8,050		4,100	7,600	10,200	5,000	2,500	12,000	10,000							59,450	
Google Inc	Technology	X				10,000	5,200	13,100	5,100	15,200	15,200	12,600		6,000				82,400	
Microsoft Corp	Technology	X	5,000	10,000	10,000	8,500		10,000			10,000	12,250						65,750	
Totals:			\$1,286,121	\$608,048	\$326,107	\$225,050	\$853,324	\$257,920	\$292,205	\$82,450	\$282,350	\$78,550	\$57,450	\$185,400	\$35,700	\$56,700		\$4,627,375	
Source:		IBM Eclipse NSA Spy State Members Total:																\$2,832,433	61.2%

[1] Grim, R., Baumann, N., Fuller, M. (Mar. 07, 2016). At Secretive Meeting, Tech CEOs And Top Republicans Commiserate, Plot To Stop Trump. Huffington Post.

[2] IBM Eclipse Foundation

[3] OpenSecrets.org

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