
RICHARD BERMAN

Richard Berman founded and serves as the executive director of numerous tax exempt front groups while also running his own consulting firm, Berman and Associates. The non-profits then hire Berman's consulting group, which engages in lobbying and public relations for the organizations, thereby channeling between 49% and 79% of all donations made to the groups into his own pocket.¹

Berman's organizations include:

The **Center for Consumer Freedom** ("CCF" formerly Guest Choice Network "GCN"), which attacks anyone who criticizes smoking, fast food or alcohol;

The **Employment Policies Institute** ("EPI") which opposes increasing the minimum wage and claims an increased minimum wage would drive the poor and uneducated out of the job market; and

The **American Beverage Institute** ("ABI"), which fights laws designed to curb drunk driving.

The **Center for Union Facts**, which runs virulently anti-union pr campaigns.

Teachers Union Exposed, which blames the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers for the ills affecting public schools.

Interlock Facts, which alleges that soon all cars will be outfitted with interlocks preventing those who have even had just one drink from driving.

GUEST CHOICE NETWORK/CENTER FOR CONSUMER FREEDOM

Guest Choice Network founded in 1995 with Philip Morris seed money. GCN was formed in 1995 "to fight bans on smoking in restaurants and bars"² and received considerable funding from tobacco companies, including \$600,000 in seed money from Philip Morris. According to Philip Morris documents, Berman has received at least \$2,950,000 from the company.³

- GCN attacked Mothers Against Drunk Driving, calling MADD a group of "professional fund-raisers" who try to "scare us away from even responsible drinking."
- GCN criticized the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for its warnings about salmonella-related food poisoning, stating "For nearly three decades, [CDC] has been whipping up fear over food while remaining virtually unchallenged by the press or the scientific community. By generating more heat than light, [CDC] helps create fear . . . over . . . food products."

- In an editorial appearing on CCF's website, Berman referred to a "lack of evidence that second-hand smoke causes cancer."⁴

GCN became CCF in 2001, shifted focus to food & beverage issues. Guest Choice Network changed its name to the Center for Consumer Freedom in 2001 and shifted its focus to "food and beverage issues, raised by concerns about obesity, mad cow disease and genetically modified products."⁵

Berman admits bulk of CCF's funding comes from food & restaurant companies⁶ and that some of those who fund CCF are also clients of his lobbying firm.⁷

Donors include Coca-Cola, Wendy's, Tyson's Foods, Cargill, Outback Steakhouse.

According to *The New York Times* "A watchdog group in Washington, the Center for Media and Democracy, has posted data about Consumer Freedom's financing on its Web site. According to documents they say were obtained from a former Consumer Freedom staff member, corporate contributors to the group as of 2002 included Coca-Cola, Wendy's and Tyson Foods, each of which gave \$200,000. Cargill gave \$100,000, according to the documents, and Outback Steakhouse gave \$164,600."⁸ Other alleged donors include Brinker Int'l, and RTM Restaurant Group, the owner of Arby's.⁹

CCF launched 2005 ad campaign challenging "myth" of obesity crisis. CCF purchased ad space in Washington DC's Metro rail during the summer of 2005 and ran ads charging that the obesity epidemic in the United States is a myth propagated by the "food police."¹⁰

2004 CCF ad campaign was critical of nutritionists. In 2004, CCF "ran television ads that featured the Soup Nazi of 'Seinfeld' fame ordering overweight people to eat salad -- a clear jab at what the group considers pushy nutritionists who are trying to suck the joy out of eating."¹¹

CCF attacked researcher's study on childhood obesity. CCF "trashed a seminal 2001 Harvard study co-authored by Dr. David Ludwig, director of the obesity program at Children's Hospital Boston, as 'dubious science.'" The study found that every additional can of soda kids drink daily increases their risk of becoming obese by 60 percent.¹² Ludwig asserted that his own research techniques were "commonly used," and that his "methodology has been validated, and can provide important and useful information if used accurately." He also said that Berman and his staff never contacted him to clarify his research before widely attacking it.¹³

CCF Maintains Fishscam.com website. Fishscam.com aims to dismiss concerns about mercury in fish.¹⁴ In a news report covering FishScam.com's efforts to dissuade consumers from fearing mercury poisoning from fish consumption, Berman's tactics were described as "hyperbolic, aggressive attacks (he once told a reporter his strategy is to "shoot the messenger")."¹⁵

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- ¹ <http://www.consumerdeception.com/public.html>
 - ² New York Times, June 12, 2005.
 - ³ <http://consumerdeception.com/append4.html>
 - ⁴ http://www.consumerfreedom.com/oped_detail.cfm?oped=123
 - ⁵ Washington Post, April 27, 2005.
 - ⁶ New York Times, June 12, 2005.
 - ⁷ New York Times, June 12, 2005.
 - ⁸ New York Times, June 12, 2005.
 - ⁹ Washington Post, April 27, 2005.
 - ¹⁰ American Prospect, September 2005.
 - ¹¹ New York Times, June 12, 2005.
 - ¹² San Francisco Chronicle, 8/10/03
 - ¹³ San Francisco Chronicle, 8/10/03
 - ¹⁴ http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/02/13/AR2006021301913.html?nav=rss_business
 - ¹⁵ Village Voice, 1/24/06