

Speaker 1 ([00:04](#)):

Welcome to The Bill Walton Show, featuring conversations with leaders, entrepreneurs, artists, and thinkers, fresh perspectives on money, culture, politics, and human flourishing. Interesting people, interesting things.

Bill Walton ([00:25](#)):

Welcome to The Bill Walton Show. Unfortunately, we're taping this show in a terrible time for the country. We've had the pandemic virus affecting our country and countries all over the world, and the economy is shut down. I think one of the things that we're missing are our essential freedoms. As part of addressing what's going on with this virus, shutting down business, shutting down the right to assemble, that has me almost... Well, it did have me turning to the Bill of Rights and to the Declaration of Independence. You look at freedom of religion, freedom of press, freedom to petition government, things like that, the cornerstones of what has made America great are definitely under threat as we speak. From Thomas Jefferson, we have our right to pursue life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, but it seems like in the pursuit of life, which is an existentially important thing to do, we seem to have forgotten the other two aspects of the Declaration, which is liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Bill Walton ([01:36](#)):

With me in the cause of freedom, fellow travelers, fellow warriors, are Lawson Bader and Tracie Sharp. Lawson is CEO of the DonorsTrust, which is an organization which steers donor money to highly promising conservative and libertarian nonprofit groups throughout the country and, in some cases, around the world. Tracie Sharp is doing very important work as the CEO of the State Policy Network. In that, she works with think tanks and action tanks throughout the country in all 50 states, and really has her eye and ear to the ground to let us know how everybody's being affected by this current situation. They've come together to create something that's called the Growth and Resilience Project, which I think is a terrific idea for today's issues.

Bill Walton ([02:35](#)):

With that, I'd like to kick it off, and let's pick ladies first. Tracie, tell us about the Growth and Resilience Project.

Tracie Sharp ([02:44](#)):

Well, this came about out of the need from the coronavirus crisis that we're all in, and a lot of this is being addressed through direct policy, especially at the state and local level. We know that in the first few weeks, the moves that were made by governors to open up healthcare access, these were public policy moves, most of which came from this network of think tanks around the country, at least one in every state, to help increase access, which these changes helped save lives. Out of that success, we knew that eventually we would need to get this economy going again, and out of that came the Growth and Resilience Project, working with DonorsTrust to bring together investors and donors and people of influence who care about saving lives, keeping people safe and healthy, and a big part of that is getting this economy going again. I was pleased when Lawson Bader of DonorsTrust came up with the idea, gave us a call, and we got it launched very quickly.

Bill Walton ([03:54](#)):

Philosophically, the thing that distinguishes this that I think is so important is it's civil society solutions to today's problems. It's people organizing themselves locally to address problems as they happen locally and fix them. It doesn't involve government determining outcomes or actions. Lawson?

Lawson Bader ([04:19](#)):

No, that's exactly right, Bill. Obviously, DonorsTrust represents the philanthropic community in all of this. It's important to remember that obviously this whole thing started with the health crisis, a legitimate one, and whenever we have crises across the country, be they hurricanes, earthquakes, famine, donors, philanthropy is always quick to step up and help. We certainly have seen that happening when it comes to the medical need. The problem is a health crisis precipitated an economic crisis, and it's actually the reactions of, largely, governors, elected officials, well-intentioned or not, that have now put us in a different kind of world where the response actually requires the right kind of policy response, because if we don't get that right, we won't be in a position to actually make some of the advances in health that have happened.

Lawson Bader ([05:14](#)):

The idea of the project was to come along with our donors to partner with groups like the State Policy Network, the Atlas Network, which also represents the global think tank free-market community, and to focus on some quick solutions to address regulatory barriers to get people back to work, to focus on health access, to look at some of the ridiculous rules out there affecting who can have what. There are accounting rules, for example, that penalize certain businesses for stockpiling medical supplies. Well, it seems counterintuitive at the moment. We have to think of this as the commonsensical approach to address some of these regulatory issues so that we can actually get food back into process and all the distribution processes going, and get some common-sense thinking to how people actually organize and go back to retail stores, because that's where the devastation has occurred. So if we can partner and turn this economic crisis into some resilience, and use the think tank community, both national and state, that's where we want to do it.

Bill Walton ([06:25](#)):

Well, common sense involves doing what's necessary where it's necessary. Tracie, the virus has disproportionately affected some states, but not many others. Can you give us a profile of where this is a big problem and where not so much?

Tracie Sharp ([06:44](#)):

Well, we do know, obviously, that California and New York have been deeply affected, but every state in some way has been affected. This is why it's important that we allow each state to... See, proximity in policy matters, which is why policy is put forth that are specially designed to help each state. It's better to try to solve these issues at the state level.

Tracie Sharp ([07:11](#)):

See, a lot of what Lawson was talking about, and really our core beliefs, is that we believe in private, voluntary solutions to help mitigate human suffering. What happened in the first couple of weeks to increase access came from market-oriented ideas that were private and voluntary, and having philanthropy come in to help, having policymakers at the local level infused with these ideas where it's relevant and responsive to the needs of the people in those states.

Bill Walton ([07:43](#)):

What's an example of some of those?

Tracie Sharp ([07:45](#)):

Well, for healthcare access, it was a removal of certificate-of-need laws, which, this is going to be an oversimplification, but allows for equipment to move more freely, and access to equipment. It's expanding telehealth. It's expanding the scope of practice, which lets medical professionals work at the top of their field, and removing requirements around licensing. Of course, we keep front of mind the health and safety of the patients. But with executive orders, stroke of the pens, these were put in place. These barriers to health access were removed, and as a result, lives were saved. You know when the governors of Colorado and Michigan are picking up state think tank ideas, these market-oriented ideas, we really want to make these temporary changes permanent because average Americans benefit.

Bill Walton ([08:40](#)):

Well, I wish the governor of Michigan would take up more of your ideas.

Tracie Sharp ([08:43](#)):

Well, yeah, we're working on that.

Bill Walton ([08:45](#)):

She's become notorious. She's determined our power tools we want to buy at Home Depot are nonessential. Maybe she's right, maybe not. I think not. Lawson?

Lawson Bader ([08:56](#)):

Yeah, in my opinion, it's got the greatest banner, "No seed, but you can get weed."

Bill Walton ([09:05](#)):

What are some of the projects that you've supported? I see the Competitive Enterprise Institute is one of them. Lincoln Network is another. Talk about what you're trying to do.

Lawson Bader ([09:17](#)):

Exactly. What we've done is come up with initial resources. We've started to advertise, go ahead and submit things, and try to come up with some fairly clear and narrow definitions of what we're looking for, ideas of economic deregulation, reducing barriers to entry, employment, and also, frankly, countering the narrative of the Michigan governor, among others.

Lawson Bader ([09:44](#)):

We had the first round come in. We have funded five initially. The Competitive Enterprise Institute has a project called Never Needed, which is the hashtag #NeverNeeded, looking at the campaign for why did we even have that rule in the first place. This is a scalable idea. CEI can help run it, but frankly, it can flow to the SPN Network and Atlas Network, and so it's replicable.

Lawson Bader ([10:10](#)):

We funded a project, actually, in Indonesia because we're looking globally at this, because this is a global issue at the moment, and there are some barriers to food production actually that have been caused by some government rules. The organization there is looking at an opportunity to actually reduce those to see a free flow of food and beverages into Indonesia, which is needed at the moment.

Lawson Bader ([10:32](#)):

The Lincoln Network, looking at working with some professors to develop a better statistical model for how we analyze risk and what actually is the data that we're seeing specifically related to the COVID-19.

Lawson Bader ([10:46](#)):

The National Taxpayers Union Foundation is a fourth project. They're looking at some of the nitty gritty that we wouldn't think of, like how tax filing status is going to change, loosening flexible spending accounts, for example, the rules that govern that. Telework paperwork is a whole issue that none of us really thought was a big deal two months ago, but the reality is that many of us are teleworking at the moment.

Lawson Bader ([11:11](#)):

Then the Mercatus Center has a free market education online project.

Lawson Bader ([11:16](#)):

Each of those is looking at a piece of that. We literally have 22 proposals right now that we're looking through, and another five or 10 on the way. We're just trying to find the broadest ones that apply in a way that can be scalable, can be utilized right now, and that, frankly, by us doing this, we're hoping that other donors and other organizations see value and come alongside and support those efforts.

Bill Walton ([11:44](#)):

Where would I find the never... I like the list of #NeverNeeded regulations. Is that on the CEI website already?

Lawson Bader ([11:51](#)):

Contact CEI for that. We have created a website at DonorsTrust which defines the project and lists the organizations that have been already granted, but CEI would be where I would go to see that. One of the ones is looking at how the FCC, for example, has made some changes that now make it difficult to telemedicine and the spectrum allocation, how that's distorted things at a time when we need a lot of spectrum news-

Bill Walton ([12:20](#)):

Is there a silver lining to all this crisis in that we might see that, as the smoke clears and we come up for air and we get back to work and things, that more people are looking at some of these regulatory constraints or barriers in a way to say, "It's now time to get rid of them"?

Lawson Bader ([12:37](#)):

I think that's the hope. You have a lot of eye-rolling right now, I'm sure, just as many supporters of the Michigan governor thinking, "Really? You can't buy house plants to go outside and plant?" How do you turn that confusion, which is not an ideological reaction, into an opportunity?

Lawson Bader ([12:59](#)):

I'm sure some of your listeners know the Overton window, the idea that politicians are going to respond to what is perceived as popular. Well, if some of these things can be shown to be ludicrous and unnecessary, and as Tracie said, actually affecting lives, you start to shift that to opportunities, and what used to be considered a bad word, like deregulation, now becomes a much more commonsensical approach, so, frankly, we can avoid this happening again.

Bill Walton ([13:29](#)):

The Overton window is the idea that you've got certain ideas that are so outside the pale, outside the bound, they couldn't be in the window, never consider them, and then there's something that we considered radical, that if you start looking at it freshly, it gets more realistic, and eventually these ideas work their way through into policy. Is that essentially-

Lawson Bader ([13:49](#)):

That's exactly right.

Tracie Sharp ([13:50](#)):

Right. We think we have that opportunity in the states, that there's a gap, an opportunity that's opened up to move that Overton window of what's politically possible, a lot in healthcare access. But now as we try to get the economy started again, to help states meet their budgets... Well, they will all have budget shortfalls, and so the state groups are activating to move that Overton window at this time.

Bill Walton ([14:15](#)):

Now, do you also do the rich state, poor state study, or is that-

Lawson Bader ([14:20](#)):

ALEC's work.

Bill Walton ([14:21](#)):

Yeah, because this is also an opportunity to see what works and what doesn't work. On one end of the spectrum, you've got the Michigan governor, and on the other end, you've got... Is it the North Dakota or South Dakota governor that has a completely different take on it? Can we hope we can draw some conclusions about how a state government ought to act like in a circumstance like this?

Lawson Bader ([14:47](#)):

No, I think that's exactly right. I certainly think there are some fiscal decisions being made right now, and Ohio and Maryland and other states are saying, "Look, we're going to freeze all clearly non-COVID-19-related spending," and you're not getting the legislative pushback that one would normally have because I think people realize that state budgets are in trouble. The last thing a state is going to do right now is raise taxes, and so you're getting some of that spending cutting, fiscal responsibility that may not have been there otherwise. That becomes an opportunity. As other governors see success of others, then they're going to mimic that accordingly.

Bill Walton ([15:23](#)):

Tracie?

Tracie Sharp ([15:24](#)):

The states that are more successful in handling this are going to become models, so we're looking forward to really amplifying those successes, really trying to spread them to other states, and give credit where credit is due. This is something that the network is pushing for because these are experiments in these states that can be held up as success stories.

Bill Walton ([15:51](#)):

Everybody's under pressure now with their contribution dollars. Everybody's portfolio has shrunk by 10%, 20%, 30%, 40% in some cases. How do you see that affecting your ability to make these good ideas happen?

Lawson Bader ([16:09](#)):

We actually created this fund, in part, because of that. The reality is that lots of donors are in different situations, as you say. Some who give out of their annual income, for example, where they have jobs that are not seen as necessarily at risk, may or may not have any effect on their ability to give. Others where it's portfolio based, that decision may not be made until December, and even then, it may be until later. The challenge is finding, in the midst when probably a lot of donors are getting a lot of emails and a lot of phone calls, and I understand why, we want to create this to at least allow a decision matrix.

Lawson Bader ([16:49](#)):

It's two things. One, I originally put it together with Tracie and Brad Lips, the head of the Atlas Network, and Adam Meyerson, who's the soon-to-be outgoing president of the Philanthropy Roundtable, and then Kim Dennis, who runs Searle Freedom Trust. The idea of having those five is that they represent a lot of organizations, and so for some individuals who say, "I've got limited dollars. I've got limited time. I'm getting a lot of requests for things, and I know I want to do something. Can I maybe use this fund either to give you a grant and you can make the decision?" or you can see what we're recommending and you can come alongside and partner. We're trying to make things easy.

Bill Walton ([17:30](#)):

To be clear, the reason I was excited to have you two on is that you both probably have some of the best windows into what's working and what isn't working throughout the states, in Tracie's case, and throughout all sorts of different nonprofit think tanks and action tanks, in your case, Lawson. One of the resources you bring to bear is what organizations have actually been effective in the past and what do we think is going to be effective now. You want to amplify?

Lawson Bader ([17:57](#)):

Yeah, the challenge is that this is, obviously, a competition for dollars, and the truth of the matter is competition also forces people to innovate and be effective. At the moment, we need to have the groups that are best able to respond be the ones that are supported. No disrespect intended to those that are maybe not as well-positioned, but that's the reality at the moment.

Lawson Bader ([18:22](#)):

The thing is, there's a national and a state approach here. Some of the things simply have to be done at the federal level. That probably will involve more of the DC-based think tank world. Yet implementation at the state level is going to be an SPN and Atlas, and we want those to push up so there's pressure coming from a different way.

Lawson Bader ([18:41](#)):

Donors, of course, feel differently. Some are very passionate about the civil rights issue right now. Some are being more passionate about the deregulatory efforts in employment law in their own state. We want to provide resources that they can make the best decision, but we also do want to make recommendations and highlight those groups that we think are in the best position to make the bang for the buck, and if that's the case, then those should be supported.

Bill Walton ([19:06](#)):

Tracie, you have organizations representing almost 120 million in annual revenue and, what is it, 150 groups? Can you give us some flavors about what categories you think are being especially effective?

Tracie Sharp ([19:25](#)):

Certainly in healthcare access, where they can show market benefits can directly alleviate human suffering. Also, now they're pivoting quite powerfully to when the economy gets started again, and that is specifically to help state budget shortfalls by reprioritizing government spending, and these hiring freezes is part of that. Providing tax relief for American families and businesses. And thirdly, cutting red tape to provide certainty and encourage innovation.

Tracie Sharp ([19:56](#)):

This is the backbone of a lot of this fiscal policy work that this network is so strong at, and a gap and opportunity has opened up for us to charge in and help these policymakers with these ideas to make ends meet and to help the people of their states. We do believe there's a federal and a state component. Of course, we work predominantly in the states, and now is our opportunity to really move this forward. These groups, for years, have been set up for such a time as this.

Bill Walton ([20:28](#)):

How would we find you to find out what kind of project... A, if I'm running a nonprofit and I want to reach out to you, how do we make that happen? And secondly, if I'm a donor, how do I look at the opportunity set? I guess the third related question is "I'm a donor. Do I contribute to specific projects, or is it a pool of money that goes into what the committee decides?" How does that work?

Lawson Bader ([20:54](#)):

I'll answer all three questions in three ways. If you are an organization that is interested in applying, send in a proposal. We actually have a dedicated email, resiliencenow@donorstrust.org. Or just go to the DonorsTrust website, and you'll see where there's a link to the page and you can submit something that way. That page also has some of the requirements and details.

Lawson Bader ([21:17](#)):

If you are a donor who is interested in learning more about those projects, we have made all the projects so far that have received grants, and we'll update that shortly. They're all there. You can go to

the donorstrust.org Resilience page, and there's a list of them all. You can, obviously, contact me directly.

Lawson Bader ([21:37](#)):

Third thing, how do you help? Well, there's two ways. Because it's a project at DonorsTrust, and DonorsTrust itself is a donor-advised fund provider, but we are a charitable organization, contributions can be made directly to the fund in various ways. If, however, you really are interested in picking one of the projects that we have funded and coming alongside, just talk to me and I can help you guide that through. Again, my interest here is putting some money quickly into scalable projects that are going to have an impact, but to use this project to try to, frankly, prime giving from other sources to those same projects so that we can help begin to push the rock, the rock will continue to roll, and donors will be able to come alongside.

Lawson Bader ([22:28](#)):

Anyway, I hope I answered it.

Bill Walton ([22:30](#)):

Tracie?

Tracie Sharp ([22:30](#)):

Yeah, to give-

Bill Walton ([22:30](#)):

Yes, you answered it in three ways, maybe more.

Bill Walton ([22:36](#)):

Tracie, there are five of you on the committee deciding how you want to deploy capital. How do you decide which projects are the highest priority?

Tracie Sharp ([22:47](#)):

Well, I think, as Lawson had said, whether it's scalable, whether it directly addresses a need right now, especially to mitigate suffering, and whether it can be replicated in other states. I think there's over 100 of these kind of solution ideas on the State Policy Network website. That's spn.org, and then front slash coronavirus will give you even more drilled-down listing. But what the Growth and Resilience Project is trying to do is to get things moving more quickly, with investment and quick infusion of capital to amplify what has already worked and bring more of what's working to the fore. Lawson, is that how you would characterize it?

Lawson Bader ([23:32](#)):

That's exactly right. Foundations are notorious for taking their time. Frankly, one of the reasons why we have done this is because private foundations are slower, and we're going to need them for some long-term issues. We're able to respond quickly, so our hope is that, every week, we're actually making a financial decision, and that money is being made available to that organization almost the day of the grant. We're a very quick-moving group.

Lawson Bader ([23:56](#)):

We do look at the scalability. We look at the ability of other groups to mimic. That's important, and ultimately the success, and again, a broad approach. We do want to focus on education, but we do want to focus on pushing back on this larger narrative of how do governments respond in a crisis and what does that mean for the future, as well as very specific issues of telemedicine and what not. The more we can do that, then I think we'll have that broad seed approach, which is what we need right now.

Bill Walton ([24:27](#)):

One of the silver linings to this pandemic may be that we rethink a lot of our institutions, the way we do things. Schools have been shut down, both K-12 and colleges, and it's forced a lot of people into either homeschooling in the case of K-12 or computer-based, Zoom-based classes in the case of colleges. There are a lot of us, including me, that thinks a whole lot of education ought to already be happening that way. Do you see any cracks in the fissures of the education establishment to open up the way we teach our kids to this technology?

Tracie Sharp ([25:05](#)):

Certainly, online learning and expanding digital learning has taken off in several states, and removing barriers to that as best we can. After the black plague, a renaissance occurred, and I think we have this opportunity in education reform, especially with online learning. And Lawson, you were going to say something?

Lawson Bader ([25:25](#)):

No, I was just going to say I think there are a lot of parents out there who are, A, perhaps paying a bit more attention to what their children are studying and how their children are studying, in good and bad ways, recognizing their own strengths as educators or not. That kind of experiential knowledge is ultimately going to put more pressure to bear on the educational system, public, private, independent, whatever it might be, in a productive way, because the teachers that have really risen to the surface here have come up with some creative ways of engaging with the kids when there's not actually a physical ability to assess.

Lawson Bader ([26:05](#)):

Some parents are seeing that in a very positive way. Some are perhaps seeing how their institutions are failing them, and it's going to force a different conversation that ultimately I think will change, in the same way air travel is going to change. All of a sudden, do I need to get on an airplane to fly to go visit that person, when we actually got a pretty good conversation going through Zoom? That's going to affect that kind of activity as well.

Lawson Bader ([26:28](#)):

As well as, how many of us are going to keep our offices? How many are not? There's going to be a lot of those renaissance kinds of things that develop to be the silver lining, but I do see education as being a significant opportunity to break and crack some really calcified problems that we've had for 30, 40 years.

Bill Walton ([26:46](#)):

Here's why you know it's an opportunity. Both Oregon and Michigan more recently... I think Michigan banned homeschooling as part of their... The fear is that people would get used to it, people get used to

Khan Academy or the other kinds of online sources of teaching, and find it's a superior product, and maybe they're going to think differently about putting their tax dollars into some of the public school programs which, particularly in the inner city, haven't been working. Thoughts?

Lawson Bader ([27:17](#)):

Organizations that are focused very effectively on content and content development are going to do very well.

Bill Walton ([27:25](#)):

Okay, well, I can see where I want you to steer your Growth and Resilience money. I think education, for me, is ground zero. If we could do something to clear away the cobwebs and do something fresh, that'd be exciting for me.

Lawson Bader ([27:39](#)):

I've got a bunch of proposals right here, Bill, that focus-

Bill Walton ([27:40](#)):

I know. Wait a second, I'm going to get my pocket picked in the middle of this.

Tracie Sharp ([27:44](#)):

Well, it is a big part of our future, for sure.

Lawson Bader ([27:49](#)):

It is.

Tracie Sharp ([27:49](#)):

And if you want to help, Bill, we welcome it.

Bill Walton ([27:52](#)):

Yeah, well, I probably will. By the way, just to add, I use DonorsTrust to help me out with some of the charitable giving we do, and it's a fantastic operation, where you can basically just go on the website and decide who you want to support, then they take everything from there, so I thank you for that.

Lawson Bader ([28:15](#)):

You're welcome.

Bill Walton ([28:16](#)):

One of the other things, in this contrast of what we're dealing with now with the response from governments, is that I think you've got some rules about supporting organizations that take too much money from the government.

Lawson Bader ([28:30](#)):

We do. I think one of the distinguishing characteristics of DonorsTrust, as a donor-advised fund, is that we are focused specifically on supporting organizations that do not rely on government money to effect

their mission, and that their mission is also something that does not expand the size and scope of government. That, obviously, includes a lot of policy organizations, but it also includes the church, synagogue, and the small local orchestra that's not relying on local dollars. That's the civil society piece that matters to us, and why the policy piece matters explicitly.

Bill Walton ([29:04](#)):

We've got a minute here to wrap up. Tracie, final thoughts?

Tracie Sharp ([29:09](#)):

Well, as Lawson started saying at the very beginning, private, voluntary solutions really show America at its best. We've seen neighbor helping neighbor. This is where philanthropy and America at its best can step up and help really alleviate the suffering that's going on, get our economy going again, getting people back to work, and really moving on to a bigger, better, brighter future.

Bill Walton ([29:36](#)):

Lawson?

Lawson Bader ([29:38](#)):

Hard to follow that, but I would say-

Bill Walton ([29:41](#)):

I know. Brilliant.

Lawson Bader ([29:41](#)):

I know. 30 years of dealing with policy in Washington D.C. and the philanthropic world, this is a very, very unique situation we are in, and I am more optimistic about that Overton window possibility. That's going to require some effort and some strategic thought and some dollars to do so, but I think it's well worth it.

Bill Walton ([30:03](#)):

Well, thank you, guys. Lawson Bader, CEO of the DonorsTrust, and Tracie Sharp, CEO of the State Policy Network. You can find Lawson at... Lawson?

Lawson Bader ([30:16](#)):

Donorstrust.org.

Bill Walton ([30:17](#)):

Okay. Tracie?

Tracie Sharp ([30:19](#)):

It's spn.org for State Policy Network.

Bill Walton ([30:24](#)):

This transcript was exported on Apr 20, 2020 - view latest version [here](#).

Okay, terrific organizations. If you want to support the Growth and Resilience Project, you can find that information on the DonorsTrust website.

Bill Walton ([30:33](#)):

Well, thanks for joining us. It's The Bill Walton Show, another episode. Look forward to talking with you through this crisis, and looking through to talking with you when it's over and the sun comes out and we're all free again. Thanks for listening, and talk soon.

Speaker 1 ([30:49](#)):

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