

October 30, 2020

*“To apply the term watchdog to the Pioneer agenda, which has now been laid bare in Chieppo’s op-ed, is to further perpetuate the notion that the needs and lives of Black communities must be penned in and guarded against, rather than invested in, supported, and allowed to thrive.”*

An open letter to Pioneer Institute and Charles Chieppo regarding your Attack on the Name of George Floyd

For 32 years, the Pioneer Institute has fought tooth and nail against public policies and programs that advance the interests of Black people, Black workers, and Black communities.

Over the course of its history, the Pioneer Institute and its radical arch-conservative partners – such as the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), the [Koch Brothers](#), and the State Policy Network (SPN) – have been the vanguard of an extreme [right-wing policy agenda](#) that seeks to subvert the public good and suppress the wages of Black workers under a thin veil of self-proclaimed independence regarding the topics of government programs, government regulation, and trade unionism.

The Bradley Foundation, which [invests in](#) Pioneer, has [funded](#) efforts to [dismantle the protections](#) of the [Voting Rights Act of 1965](#).

The Pioneer Institute was part of the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) for years. Since 1998, the Pioneer Institute has received at least [\\$1,000,000 from David Koch](#). While Pioneer was affiliated with ALEC, the organization was a [key architect](#) of the “Stand your Ground Law” implicated in the murder [Trayvon Martin](#). The State Policy Network, to which [Pioneer belongs](#), remains within [ALEC](#), despite the exposure of ALEC’s [white supremacist agenda](#), and its documented alignment with white supremacist politicians.

As part of ALEC and the SPN, the Pioneer Institute has been complicit in the policies that fueled a nationwide [proliferation](#) of [private prisons](#) that have jailed our families, our neighbors, and our children at rates that many consider akin to an American apartheid.

[Pioneer](#) pushes for so-called “[right to work](#)” laws, a decadeslong attempt to promote the segregation and subjugation of Black workers through anti-democratic policies that were originally championed by Arkansan [white supremacist Vance Muse](#), who told a U.S Senate hearing in 1930, “[I am a Southerner and I am for white supremacy.](#)”

Beginning in the mid-1950’s, these policies, designed to segregate and to suppress the wages of Black workers, were [promoted by white supremacists](#), including [Fred Koch](#), the founder of Koch

Industries, father of Charles and David, and a co-founder of the John Birch Society which opposed civil rights and claimed that desegregation was a communist plot. Pioneer has picked up promotion of anti-union policies such as “right to work” that were originally conceived and designed by southern white supremacists to harm and to subjugate Black workers, and to divide the working class.

These are the ideological partners and forebearers of Pioneer, and so perhaps Pioneer’s willingness to receive money from and to be apologists for modern-day white supremacists should come as no surprise.

- Here in Massachusetts, both the Pioneer Institute and its predecessor organization, the Shamie Foundation, have spent decades attacking vital government programs and labor organizations that create career pathways and improve economic opportunity for Black people.
- In the United States, Black workers are the [most likely to be represented by unions](#): 14.5 percent of Black workers age 18 to 64 are covered by a collective bargaining agreement, compared with 12.5 percent of white workers and 10.1 percent of Hispanic workers.
- [Hourly wages for Black union workers are 14.7 percent higher](#) than those of their nonunion counterparts. Black union workers on average earn \$24.24 per hour, compared to \$17.78 for non-union Black workers. 71.4 percent of Black union workers have employer-provided health insurance, compared to 47.7 percent of non-union Black workers.
- Meanwhile, unlike the Pioneer Institute, the unions of the Greater Boston Labor Council [have stood proudly with the Black Lives Matter movement](#).

While pursuing anti-union policies that would suppress Black wages, Pioneer has also spent over three decades attacking our community’s access to well-funded public education, to public transportation, and to public health resources, relentlessly seeking to privatize all of the above for the benefit of Pioneer’s funders, despite mountains of evidence that such privatization schemes disproportionately harm communities of color.

- For years, Pioneer staffers and “fellows” have utilized the movement for racial equity and the name of [Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.](#) while arguing for an anti-union and pro-privatization agenda. Pioneer omits the fact that Dr. King was assassinated while standing with sanitation workers seeking to form a public sector union for fair wages and treatment, and stood for [redistributive policies](#) that stand in contrast to Pioneer’s priorities. Dr. King’s support for unions – and specifically for public sector unions – is a

part of history that Chiello and the Institute have repeatedly whitewashed from their cynical co-opting of Dr. King.

- Pioneer has been deafeningly silent on the racist actions and words of President Trump. Pioneer's networks, staff, funders, and leadership (past and present) have [actively supported](#) Trump in key moments of his ascent, and helped to usher him into the oval office.
- And as a simple search for the term "Black Lives" on Pioneer's website reveals, the Institute has been silent for years on the Movement for Black Lives.

Charles Chiello brought Pioneer's exploitation of Black lives for political gain to a new level through an op-ed he authored for publication this summer in Commonwealth Magazine.

Specifically, Chiello exploited the name and murder of George Floyd in a manner that warrants Chiello's resignation, along with an apology from the Institute to all Black Massachusetts residents and from any leader within the Institute who authorized Chiello's erroneous evocation of Floyd's name to grind a political axe.

What makes the white, arch-conservative Chiello feel entitled to evoke the name of Floyd in his diatribe against educators and transit workers is a question that Pioneer must grapple with.

To begin to repair the damage done, Chiello should resign from the Institute, and Pioneer should disclose and sever all ties to networks and funders that support white supremacist agendas, policies, and politicians.

In the piece, Chiello wastes no time dragging the murder and name of George Floyd into the Institute's tired vendetta against public service workers. Chiello exploits the murder of George Floyd to rant against a completely unrelated piece of local legislation, the Massachusetts Taxpayer Protection Act.

The exploitation of Black death to push an unrelated political agenda alone should have been enough to render this op-ed unpublishable for a mainstream outlet like Commonwealth Magazine.

- A high percentage of the public transit [workforce](#) who Chiello attacks in Floyd's name are Black, including dozens of Black transit workers and [union](#) members nationwide who have [died from COVID-19](#) after contracting the virus while doing their job.

- In fact, public transit drivers are disproportionately Black compared to other workforces. Over [31%](#) of public transit drivers in the United States are Black, versus 12% of the general U.S. population.
- The brand of attack-mode politics being deployed by Chieppo is dangerous to both the lives and livelihoods of Black people, and it must be rebuked.
- George Floyd’s murder has nothing to do with the public school teachers or bus drivers Chieppo attempts to malign in the op-ed. Period.
- The fact that Chieppo would use the murder George Floyd as a club in the Institute’s self-avowed war against educators and transit workers is a clear example of how white privilege can include the belief that even a brutal murder of a Black person may be used to advance totally unrelated political ends.
- The fact that Chieppo completely misrepresents the facts surrounding the [subject failure of the recent transit privatization efforts he touts](#), including facts that Commonwealth Magazine itself had documented in very recent reporting, is secondary.

And while we are rightly asking reasonable and urgent questions about what urgent and meaningful reforms are needed to end police violence and to curb police power and budgets within our communities in order to make our communities truly safe, Chieppo’s red herring regarding the general rights of educators, sanitation workers, social workers, transit workers, and others to be in unions is neither reasonable, urgent, nor relevant to the problem of police violence.

As representatives of the diverse communities that have been directly harmed by Pioneer’s harmful legacy of alignment with – and complicity with – white supremacist oriented policies, politicians, and organizations such as ALEC, SPN, the Bradley Foundation, and others, we call for Chieppo’s immediate resignation, and we exhort all foundations and corporations with ties to the Institute to withdraw funding in response to Pioneer’s attack on the name of George Floyd.

We ask Pioneer to disclose the full origins of 100% of its funding, and identify which funding sources have fiscal or organizational ties to ALEC, SPN, the Bradley Foundation, or other networks that perpetuate or espouse racism or support for the mass incarceration of Black people through the private prison system.

We also call upon all Massachusetts media outlets to decline material submitted by the Institute until such time as Chieppo resigns, and the Institute renounces its attack on the name of George Floyd and discloses its funding sources.

Finally, we call upon media outlets to cease references to the Institute as an “independent” source or as a government “watchdog”, which it is not. The Institute, like its ideological predecessors, is designed around policies tailored toward holding back the public advancement of workers, particularly Black workers who are harmed the most by Pioneer’s core lobbying principles of anti-unionism, deregulation, and privatization.

To apply the term watchdog to the Pioneer agenda is to further perpetuate the notion that the needs and lives of Black communities must be penned in and guarded against, rather than invested in, supported, and allowed to thrive.

The op-ed does not constitute the words of a watchdog, but rather an attack dog, one that bears its fangs at Black workers and their proven economic interests.

For decades, Pioneer has served their extremist right-wing funders and large corporate donors by unleashing “researchers” and “fellows” against Black workers and their economic interests across the annals of the Massachusetts media.

In addition to firing Chieppo, issuing a public apology, and rescinding their attack on the name of George Floyd, so long as Pioneer continues to evoke the name of Dr. King in their work while simultaneously trying to destroy the very rights of Black workers that Dr. King died fighting for, materials generated by Pioneer should have no place in the pages of Massachusetts media outlets that consider themselves to be editorially aligned against racism or against propaganda funded by racists, and should certainly not be considered non-partisan or independent in nature.

In the end, Chieppo has used the death of George Floyd to directly attack the economic interests Black people and communities. Therefore, we conclude this open letter to Pioneer and to Mr. Chieppo, as such, in calling for his immediate resignation:

You, the supporters and apologists of those who oppose the Voting Rights Act...

You, who are funded and abetted by the profiteers of the private prison system that has sought to re-enslave our families and communities...

You, who seek to reduce and eliminate our access to affordable, quality, public health care services...

You, who seek to dismantle environmental regulations that aim to protect our frontline communities from smog, asthma, cancer, disease, and pollution...

You, who seek to dismantle labor regulations that aim to protect our lives and bodies from the unsafe working conditions sought by your corporate allies...

You, who seek to dismantle public transit and who have defunded and privatized our system to its breaking point...

You, who seek to carry forward the racist, anti-union “right-to-work” doctrine of white supremacist Vance Muse...

You, the bedfellows of those who have profited from the political exploitation, imprisonment, and murder of Black people...

You, who have built a political framework that calls for divestment from Black communities, and for the proliferation of the incarceration and dehumanization of Black people...

You, who have stood silently by while the botched and partisan response of your political allies to the global pandemic has caused thousands of unnecessary and avoidable deaths in our communities and in our families...

You, who have stood by silently as the President supported by your network has fueled torrents of further suffering and discrimination upon Black people by inciting violent white supremacists and vigilantes...

You, who have never published, written, proclaimed, or conceded that Black Lives Matter...

You, who have consistently manipulated data and facts in order to mislead the media, and thereby the public, to turn them against vital government programs that support Black communities...

You, who have sought to destroy our right to well-funded public education and to the public schools our students deserve...

You, who have cut programs for the public good, and used the bully pulpit of the Massachusetts Governor’s office through the course of multiple administrations to oppose reforms that would support, fund, and help Black communities to thrive...

You – Charles Chieppo and your Pioneer cohorts – must understand immediately, that when we say, “Say their names,” we certainly do not mean for it to be done as part of your schemes to further devalue Black lives or Black labor. Charles Chieppo must resign.

Signed,

Alternatives for Community & Environment

Chinese Progressive Association

City Life/Vida Urbana

Coalition for Social Justice

Community Labor United

Dominican Development Center

Drive Boston

Greenroots

MA AFL-CIO Racial Justice Committee

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP Boston Chapter)

Neighbor to Neighbor

New England United for Justice