

THE NEW YORK TIMES – 11 GIUGNO 2026

We Can't Let My Former V.C. Colleagues Buy Off Our Democracy

di John O'Farrell

I first came to America from Ireland in 1984, as a young engineer about to attend business school. I chose Stanford University — partly for the weather and natural beauty, but more for the electrifying entrepreneurial spirit coursing through Silicon Valley. I was riveted by Apple's 1984 [Super Bowl ad](#) — an athlete hurls a sledgehammer into Big Brother's screen, shattering IBM's grip on computing. More than an advertisement, it was a manifesto that technology could dismantle power.

Over the past 40 years, I've been privileged to play a leading role in three start-ups and be the first general partner hired by the venture capital firm Andreessen Horowitz. I saw how the internet democratized information, how the iPhone put a computer in everyone's pocket, and how the cloud unleashed a tsunami of new software. Each wave showed that technology could be a powerful force for good, that the upstarts could win on the merits and that open competition and debate were values the tech industry welcomed and promoted.

Just as artificial intelligence is on the rise, that ethos is now under threat — and the threat is coming from inside Silicon Valley.

Some of the most powerful players in A.I. — led by some of my friends and former partners, to my great sadness — have raised hundreds of millions of dollars to forestall a more serious and meaningful debate about how A.I. should be governed. They have helped create political action committees to help defeat candidates who want strict regulations on A.I. and to promote those who can be counted on to stay out of their way. I believe this is a huge mistake.

A.I. is not just another technology. It could drive productivity to new heights while automating away work for millions. It could find a cure for cancer, while accelerating

biological risks we're not prepared for. It could transform how our children learn, while leaving them unable to tell real from fake. It could concentrate economic power in ways that would make the Gilded Age look quaint.

The rise of the A.I. industry demands a national conversation about how to share its potential benefits widely while addressing people's legitimate fears. That conversation is beginning to happen, between unions, child safety advocates, civil rights organizations, economists and A.I. companies themselves. What's missing is political leadership — legislators who are informed enough, and independent enough, to translate that debate into durable policy. Tech industry leaders should be doing everything they can to encourage more politicians to get up to speed and to engage.

The playbook we're seeing comes from the crypto industry, which successfully neutered efforts to regulate it by spending tens of millions of dollars to help [defeat pro-regulation candidates](#) and elect industry-friendly politicians in 2024. Andreessen Horowitz, in fact, contributed heavily to a crypto PAC, Fairshake, which pioneered that model. Last year, the firm helped found an A.I. PAC, Leading the Future. Other Leading the Future contributors include the OpenAI co-founder and president Greg Brockman, the Palantir co-founder Joe Lonsdale and the A.I. company Perplexity. The PAC has raised over [\\$125 million](#) — not to make the case for their vision of A.I. policy, but, in my view, to intimidate politicians who appear to engage too aggressively with the question of how to govern A.I.

Leading the Future's first target was Alex Bores, a New York State assemblyman who co-sponsored state-level A.I. regulation and is now running for Congress. The \$6 million of ads the PAC has run against Mr. Bores make little mention of A.I. An attack ad in January on Mr. Bores by an affiliate of Leading the Future focused on [claims](#) that he made his money developing technology for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, allegations that Mr. Bores [has said are false](#). The message to every other legislator seems clear: Touch A.I. regulation, and we will come for you, too.

Public First Action, a pro-regulation PAC backed by executives from Anthropic and others, which was formed with the explicit aim of countering Leading the Future, has waded in with more than \$3 million to support Mr. Bores, part of \$6 million from four PACs. I understand that impulse, but I don't support this move either. Huge political

spending is toxic to our democracy. It distorts the electoral process, and it won't give the American people the thoughtful A.I. policy we deserve.

I believe this attempted political infiltration by the A.I. industry will fail. It misreads the public mood entirely. Americans [believe](#) the system is rigged by the wealthy and powerful. They're also deeply concerned about A.I. — a [backlash](#) is building, and it will become fiercer when voters learn that a handful of billionaires are altogether spending nine figures, apparently in an effort to try to stop debates about regulation from further developing.

As the A.I. industry's political spending is exposed, candidates who accept it run the risk of being seen by voters as being in the industry's pocket. (I should disclose that I've been approached by people interested in more aggressively exposing the A.I. lobby's attempts to buy political influence, and I may contribute my own money to these public awareness efforts.)

I understand the fear driving this spending. Bad regulation could hobble a transformative technology. Our politicians have not always distinguished themselves, with some unsophisticated, ill-informed attempts at technology regulation. But you don't achieve balanced, intelligent regulation by silencing debate — you get it by engaging seriously and earning trust.

There is a far better use of those hundreds of millions spent on campaign consultants and negative ads. The A.I. industry could sponsor nationwide university [boot camps](#) to educate politicians, civil society organizations, regulators and the general public on A.I. — not promotional roadshows, but genuine, rigorous learning. It could fund experiments in using A.I. to radically [improve public services](#), such as better [health care access](#) in underserved communities, more responsive [local government](#) and [better schools](#).

That money could fund a [moonshot](#) to try to prove A.I. can, in fact, discover a cure for cancer. It could endow policy institutes focused on solutions for the hardest questions: how to [share the economic gains](#) broadly, how to address [job displacement](#), how to preserve the [dignity of work](#) and how to build [safety frameworks](#) that keep pace with the technology itself. It could champion [international cooperation](#) on A.I. risk.

I'm still convinced that technology can be a powerful force for good. A.I. epitomizes that power. While I disagree with my former partners, none of my criticism is personal. This is a question of what's best for America and the world. We have an extraordinary opportunity to model good citizenship and principled leadership by actively promoting A.I. policies that work for everyone. Let's not waste it.