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Silicon Valley AI political groups turn on each other in the 2026 election

[AI political spending splits Silicon Valley ahead of election](#)

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Key Points

- Political groups favoring faster AI development and lighter, more uniform rules have spent about \$8 million in general-election congressional races, besting the sum of about \$6.9 million spent by groups focused on safeguards, a CNBC analysis of Federal Election Commission filings shows.
- The rival camps have spent about \$78.5 million on federal candidates this election cycle, with nearly three-quarters going toward primary contests before spending fell sharply in the general election.
- The split is producing head-to-head political fights, including in Florida's 25th District, as Silicon Valley divides over AI regulation and state authority.



Protesters hold up “Freeze AI Now” signs outside OpenAI headquarters in San Francisco, Oct. 20, 2026.

Heather Diehl | Getty Images

Silicon Valley’s bid to dominate [artificial intelligence](#) politics has devolved into a fight with itself.

With one week until the [midterm election](#), political groups favoring faster AI development and lighter, more uniform rules have spent roughly \$8 million in [general-election congressional races](#), besting groups pushing for stronger safeguards and more room for states to regulate that have spent about \$6.9 million, according to a CNBC analysis of Federal Election Commission filings through Oct. 20.

In Florida’s 25th Congressional District, that split has produced a direct face-off. During the primary, Think Big, an affiliate of Leading the Future, the main super PAC network pushing faster AI development and lighter regulation, spent \$310,000 supporting Democrat [Jared Moskowitz](#), whose district changed after Florida redrew its congressional map ahead of the 2026 election. On the other side, Defending Our Values, a super PAC favoring stricter safety guardrails and state-level authority, dropped almost \$857,000 to boost Republican Scott Singer and an additional \$740,000 to keep one of his primary opponents from being elected.

Now, Moskowitz and Singer face off in the general election.

It’s a microcosm of the [breakdown](#) in Silicon Valley’s bid to build a [unified AI political machine](#). Both sides favor AI innovation and agree on the need for guardrails, but they remain locked in a

costly tug-of-war over which candidates to back — and which will best align with their preferred deployment speed, regulatory reach and balance of state power.

Electing more [allies](#) could give either camp an edge in shaping AI policy in the next [Congress](#), even as the feud risks weakening Silicon Valley's clout.

“Everyone supports some form of regulation. It’s just a debate about how much,” said [Bruce Freed](#), president and co-founder of the nonpartisan Center for Political Accountability and a former chief investigator for the Senate banking committee. “Money is flowing in all directions to be in the driver’s seat of what happens.”

CNBC identified federal committees aligned with each camp and totaled their FEC-reported independent expenditures supporting or opposing congressional candidates. The analysis excludes state races and nonprofit advocacy spending.

The crypto playbook

This was not the plan. The model was [cryptocurrency](#).

[Fairshake](#) and its affiliated pro-crypto super PACs, backed by [Coinbase](#), [Ripple](#) and [Andreessen Horowitz](#), spent more than [\\$130 million](#) during the 2024 election cycle, according to FEC filings. Candidates it supported won 53 of 58 races, a 91% success rate, according to crypto publication [CoinDesk](#).

AI investors took note. In August 2025, Leading the Future launched with more than \$100 million in commitments from tech heavyweights including Andreessen Horowitz, [OpenAI](#) President [Greg Brockman](#) and his wife, Anna, and [Perplexity](#) and [Palantir](#) co-founder [Joe Lonsdale](#).

Co-led by Josh Vlasto, who worked for Fairshake last election cycle, the network deployed a Democratic PAC, Think Big, and a Republican PAC, American Mission, to support candidates aligned with faster AI development and opposition to a patchwork of state regulations.

The message was clear: Back AI’s agenda or risk millions being spent against you.

“The AI industry announced last year that they were going to rerun the crypto industry playbook by coming in swinging with oodles of money in order to bully lawmakers into submission,” said [Sacha Haworth](#), founder and executive director of the Tech Oversight Project, a nonprofit watchdog that advocates for stronger regulation of Big Tech and AI.

At first, it worked. In the cycle’s first major primaries in March, three candidates heavily backed by American Mission — Jessica Steinmann in Texas, Chris Gober in Texas and Laurie Buckhout in North Carolina — won their Republican contests after the group spent more than \$500,000 supporting each, according to FEC filings.

But a rival infrastructure was already taking shape. [Anthropic](#) committed \$20 million to [Public First Action](#) in February and another \$20 million in July, giving the safeguards camp a major financial backer. Anthropic says its money is restricted to policy and public education and cannot fund candidate elections. Still, separately funded super PACs tied to Public First Action have spent millions advancing similar priorities.

The clash burst into view in [New York's 12th District Democratic primary](#). Think Big spent \$8.3 million, according to FEC filings, trying to defeat state Assemblymember Alex Bores, who authored major state AI safety legislation. The Anthropic-backed Jobs and Democracy PAC countered with about \$15 million to support him, while allied safety groups spent millions more, according to CNBC's analysis.

Think Big and Jobs and Democracy spent a combined \$23.3 million, about 40% of the two camps' primary spending nationwide, according to the analysis.

Bores ultimately [lost](#) to Micah Lasher, 39% to 35%, giving Think Big a tactical victory.

"They helped light a flame under the backlash that's now fueling so much of the midterm elections," Haworth said. "The race showed that spending against safety-first candidates could now trigger a counterattack from within the industry itself."



New York Assemblymember Alex Bores at an immigration protest on Sept. 18, 2025.

Erik McGregor | Lightrocket | Getty Images

The money slows

The fight has carried into the general election, but the pace of spending plummeted.

Safeguards-focused groups have spent \$825,000 this fall opposing two Republicans who benefited from [Leading the Future-aligned](#) spending during the primaries, according to CNBC's analysis of FEC filings. The two races alone account for more than one-sixth of the safeguards camp's general-election opposition spending.

Guardrails Alliance reported spending \$412,500 apiece, according to FEC filings, against Republican House candidates Jay Feely in Arizona and Aaron Flint in Montana, both of whom benefited from Leading the Future-aligned spending in their primaries. It also reported about \$412,000 against Democratic Rep. Jimmy Gomez in California, whom Leading the Future endorsed but did not report spending to support, according to CNBC's analysis.

"The big AI groups still believe that their money can help influence elections even if it's just a couple in November," Haworth said.

AI groups spend on opposing sides

Groups backed by competing factions of the AI industry have landed on opposite sides of congressional races across the country, pouring millions of dollars into the same contests.

Pro-quick AI deployment Faster AI development, lighter and more uniform rules

Race

Pro-more AI safeguards Stronger safety rules, more room for states to regulate

Think Big

Jobs & Democracy

New York 12thDemocratic primary Alex Bores **Max \$15M**

\$8.3MAgainst Alex Bores

\$15.0MSupporting Alex Bores

Think Big

Defending Our Values

Florida 25thGeneral-election matchup Moskowitz (D) vs. Singer (R)**Primary spending shown**
Max \$1M

\$310KSupporting Jared Moskowitz

\$857KSupporting Scott Singer

\$740KAgainst Singer's primary opponent

American Mission

Guardrails Alliance

Arizona 1st General election Jay Feely (R) **Max \$1M**

\$616.4K Supporting Jay Feely in the primary

\$412.5K Against Jay Feely in the general election

American Mission

Guardrails Alliance

Montana 1st General election Aaron Flint (R) **Max \$1M**

\$590.4K Supporting Aaron Flint in the primary

\$412.5K Against Aaron Flint in the general election

Source: CNBC analysis of Federal Election Commission filings through Oct. 20, 2026. **By Luke Fountain**

Yet the overall flow of AI campaign money has slowed since the primaries.

Leading the Future's network reported roughly \$26 million in primary independent expenditures, compared with about \$8 million in general-election races. Safeguards-focused groups reported about \$32.1 million in primary spending and \$6.9 million in general-election contests. The groups reported another roughly \$5.5 million in runoff and special-election spending.

Combined, about 74% of the roughly \$78.5 million they have spent on federal candidates this cycle went toward primary races, according to CNBC's analysis.

Some of that decline reflects the smaller universe of competitive November races. But the slowdown has coincided with AI becoming a more difficult political sell.

A new [CNBC All-America Economic Survey](#) found 52% of registered voters said companies should pause development of advanced AI until Congress passes regulations, compared with 32% who favored moving ahead. Sixty-three percent said they would [oppose an AI data center](#) within 10 miles of their home.

"When evaluating risk versus reward right now, the backlash is just too big," said [Freed](#), of the Center for Political Accountability.

"AI executives and groups spent heavily in the primaries, so they likely achieved what they set out to do in most races. At this point, there's no real downside to scaling back," Freed said.

Some major donors have gone further.

The Brockmans gave \$25 million to Leading the Future. But amid objections from OpenAI employees to the group's tactics, OpenAI's chief strategy officer acknowledged internally that the company was taking "reputational hits," according to [Semafor](#).

The Brockmans later abandoned plans for another \$25 million contribution, according to [The New York Times](#).

Meta has retreated as well. Political groups it funded returned \$25 million this summer — \$22 million from the AI-promoting American Technology Excellence Project and \$3 million from its California operation — according to [IRS](#) and [state filings](#). The refunds cut its planned \$65 million state-level political push by nearly 40%, to about \$40 million. The Times first [reported](#) the refunds.

"Something's clearly not working," OpenAI CEO Sam Altman told [Politico earlier this month](#). "I don't think spending money on politics is what's going to make people feel better about it."