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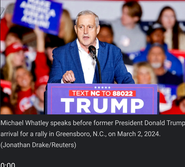
RNC Suit Seeks Information About $2 Million 'Zuckerbucks' Grant in Georgia

The RNC alleges a Georgia county didn't fully comply with a records request about a $2 million grant from the U.S. Alliance for Election Excellence.



Michael Whatley speaks before former President Donald Trump's arrival for a rally in Greensboro, N.C., on March 2, 2024. (Jonathan Drake/Reuters)

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The Republican National Committee is filing suit to see if one of Georgia's most populous counties illegally received private funding for its public election activities.

On May 16, the RNC filed a one-count complaint against the DeKalb County Voter Registration and Elections Office, along with various county officials and related offices, in the Superior Court of DeKalb County, Georgia. The complaint alleges the county failed to comply with Georgia's Open Records Act by not providing all public records related to its dealings with the U.S. Alliance for Election Excellence.

In February 2023, the county announced it received $2 million from the Alliance. At the time, the county said in a release it would join "a select bipartisan group of election officials to share best practices and strategies in their ongoing pursuit of excellence."

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The Alliance is closely associated with the Center for Tech and Civic Life. In 2020, the Center handed out more than $350 million in grants to cities and counties for the purpose of reinforcing their election infrastructure. The Epoch Times previously reported most of the grants went to left-leaning jurisdictions within swing states.
According to the Center's 2020 tax filing, it issued a cash grant of about $9.6 million to DeKalb County, Georgia, "to support the safe administration of public elections during the COVID-19 pandemic."

The Center's fiscal 2022 tax filing, covering February 2022 through the end of January 2023, shows it granted DeKalb County $2 million "to support election administration, equipment, and secure infrastructure" during its fiscal year. It was one of five counties that received a grant during that period.

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The Center launched the Alliance in April 2022 as an $80 million, five-year project to bring together "bipartisan election officials to rally around a set of common values and standards, support each other, and keep their skills fresh," it said on its website.

The Center is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. It does not disclose its donors.

Georgia Elections

In 2020, Georgia's 16 Electoral College went to President Joe Biden. It was the first time the state had supported a Democratic Party candidate since 1992. According to the official results from the Georgia Secretary of State's office, President Biden beat out former President Donald Trump by about 12,000 votes. Nearly 5 million ballots were cast in the presidential election.

According to the Georgia Secretary of State's office, President Biden received about 308,000 of the 370,000 ballots cast in November 2020 in DeKalb County, Georgia's fourth-most populous county.

Since the 2020 election, numerous states have passed measures to ban private funding of public elections. On May 15, the U.S. House Ways and Means Committee advanced a bill establishing a national ban on the practice.

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In congressional testimony presented in February, Capital Research Center President Scott Walter called the Alliance a way for the Center for Tech and Civic Life to avoid these bans and to "ensnare local government offices."

In May 2023, Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp, a Republican, signed a law banning local governments from accepting any funding for elections from outside groups.

In November 2023, the RNC filed an Open Records Act request to collect more information about the grant. However, it said the county "took months" to respond and provided "implausibly few documents about this substantial injection of funds."

In a release, RNC Chairman Michael Whatley said the suit is necessary to obtain the complete records about DeKalb County's grant and to "hold the county accountable."

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"Ensuring illegal money is not influencing our election process is critical in Georgia and beyond," Mr. Whatley said. "The RNC is dedicated to ensuring a fair and transparent election without wrongful influence."

RNC Not Satisfied With Information Provided

According to the complaint, DeKalb County officials constantly missed their own deadlines for complying with the records request over a four-month period. The request was completed in March, but according to the RNC, it did not provide everything requested.
The committee received "limited" email communications about the county's enrollment with the Alliance and the Center and meetings between the parties, according to the complaint.

"Defendants did not produce a single internal communication relating to DeKalb County's actual receipt or use of the grant money it received through the Alliance," the complaint said. "It is implausible that Defendants did not engage in any internal communications regarding the actual receipt or use of a substantial grant it received through membership in an organization that was sure to cause public and/or legal controversy."

The complaint seeks a declaration that the requested records are public and, therefore, must be disclosed. It also seeks injunctions requiring the defendants to produce all of the RNC's requested documents and to say what, if any, documents are being withheld due to a claim of attorney-client privilege. Finally, it seeks an award of attorney's fees and other litigation costs.

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Alex Kaufman and Christian Zimm of Chalmers, Adams, Backer & Kaufman LLC, of Johns Creek, Georgia, signed the suit.

In recent weeks, the RNC has filed numerous election-related lawsuits across the country, including actions in Nevada, Arizona, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and now Georgia.

Representatives of the Center for Tech and Civic Life, the U.S. Alliance for Election Excellence, and DeKalb County, Georgia, did not respond to a request for comment before press time.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

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