

The Media's Shameful Revisionist History of "Zuck Bucks"



A majority of Wisconsin voters approved a ballot measure on April 2 that made Wisconsin the [28th state](#) to adopt a ban on private funding of elections. The next day, news headlines were filled with baseless smears. One particular [article](#), from *USA Today*, used the now classic "Republicans pounce!" framing: "Trump and the GOP weaponized Mark Zuckerberg's donations; what it means for the 2024 election."

The article claims the Wisconsin ballot measure "[stemmed] from misinformation surrounding" Mark Zuckerberg's infamous \$400 million donation to the Center for Tech and Civic Life (CTCL). To support this claim, the article references a Federal Elections Commission (FEC) report's citation of a report commissioned by Mark Zuckerberg wherein former FEC chairman Michael Toner "found that more grants were given to jurisdictions who voted for Trump rather than Biden in 2020."

The FEC Report

The article leaves out several very important details of that report. Details that prove Zuckerberg's donation *was* weaponized, just not in favor of Republicans.

First, the article neglects to reveal that, in the *very same sentence it quotes from*, the [FEC report](#) also says "[Toner's] review reportedly found that overall more funds were awarded to Democratic-leaning jurisdictions." The original *Washington Examiner* report on the topic even says that "the majority of the cash value" of CTCL grants went to Democrat cities and counties.

Second, the article does not mention that Toner's report, commissioned by its own subject of investigation, *was never actually made public*. It was merely summarized in [an article](#) by the *Washington Examiner*, which was then cited by the FEC. Even in the FEC report, as shown above, Toner's findings are only referenced with the caveat "reportedly."

Obviously, this was shoddy reporting, but even if the article *had* fully explained Toner's findings, it still wouldn't justify the charge of misinformation. The fact that a higher number of Republican counties received funding clears CTCL of absolutely nothing. There are hundreds, maybe thousands, more Republican counties than there are Democrat counties, of course that would be the result. What really matters is *how much money* Republican and Democrat counties received. Toner's study admitted that Democrat counties received "the majority" of funds, but lazily trusted that this was due to the higher average population of Democrat counties without any investigation.

Clear Bias

Capital Research Center wasn't lazy in its investigation and reporting, however. And what we found suggests a clear bias weighted toward Democrats.

Our researchers dug into the data and [found](#) clear disparities in CTCL's grantmaking across all major 2020 swing states. In Wisconsin, 90 percent of CTCL funds went to Democrat cities. Blue cities received an average of \$3.75 per resident, while red cities averaged just \$0.55 per resident. In Pennsylvania, red counties averaged just \$0.60 per resident while blue counties averaged \$2.85. In Georgia, red counties averaged \$1.41 per resident while blue counties averaged \$5.33. The "larger population" argument simply doesn't hold up to serious scrutiny, and while Toner's report remains unavailable to the public, our findings, data, and methodology have been available for anyone to see for over two years.

The claim that misinformation alone motivated the ballot measure is indefensible, as is the article's blatantly selective quoting from a report, citing a report, that summarized a report that suffered from obvious conflicts of interest and was never actually published.

Omissions

Likewise indefensible are the things about Wisconsin's experience with "Zuck bucks" that were left out of the article.

[According to CBS News](#), the Wisconsin Supreme Court ruled in January of *this year* that a mobile voting van paid for with CTCL funds in the city of Racine was illegally used to give Democrats an unfair partisan advantage in the 2022 election. It's impossible to believe that such a notable ruling would elude the notice of *USA Today's* reporter when it directly pertained to the subject and state of her article. Also suspiciously absent from the article is that emails show Green Bay city clerk Kris Teske [resigned her post](#) during the 2020 election after submitting multiple complaints that the mayor and a CTCL "grant advisor" were pressuring her to allow CTCL's grant advisors to perform election functions that she was not certain were legal.

Concerns about Zuck bucks are not based in misinformation and were not "weaponized" by conservatives. Lumping these allegations in with other unsubstantiated claims regarding elections is lazy and irresponsible. *USA Today* should be ashamed.

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