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The Wisconsin “Zuckerbucks” Problem: New Data Reveals Private Funding of Election Offices Was More Widespread Than Initially Estimated

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KEY FINDINGS



**MORE THAN \$10 MILLION IN ZUCKERBUCKS
POURED INTO THE BADGER STATE.**



**ZUCKERBUCKS FLOWED INTO
216 MUNICIPALITIES IN WISCONSIN,
COVERING 39 COUNTIES.**



**THE FIVE MOST POPULOUS CITIES IN
WISCONSIN—MILWAUKEE, MADISON, GREEN
BAY, KENOSHA, AND RACINE—RECEIVED
NEARLY \$8.5 MILLION IN TOTAL.**



**SOME JURISDICTIONS DID NOT
SPEND ANY MONEY ON PERSONAL
PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE).**

THE BOTTOM LINE:

**WISCONSIN SHOULD PROHIBIT OUTSIDE
MONEY FROM FINANCING ELECTIONS.**

Overview

During the 2020 presidential election, the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative—led by tech billionaire Mark Zuckerberg and his wife—donated more than \$400 million to local election offices in 47 states under the guise of alleviating the burden of COVID-19-related costs.¹ The bulk of these funds were funneled through the Center for Tech and Civic Life (CTCL), a left-leaning non-profit with significant ties to various progressive groups and the Obama administration.²⁻³

While marketed as “COVID-19 Response Grants,” in many states, these funds (or “Zuckerbucks”) appeared to have little to do with offsetting pandemic-related expenses.⁴ Instead, the infusion of cash went toward boosting Democrat turnout in several swing states.⁵ In fact, grants were disproportionately siphoned to left-leaning jurisdictions.⁶ For example, in Pennsylvania, nine out of every 10 dollars that flowed into the state went to counties that voted for Biden.⁷ And in Georgia, Biden counties got nearly four times more Zuckerbucks per registered voter than Trump counties.⁸

Preliminary data showed that Wisconsin was no exception and that at least \$9 million in Zuckerbucks were poured into the state.⁹ But new data has painted a more complete picture, revealing that Zuckerbucks were an even bigger problem than previously estimated.



NEW DATA HAS PAINTED A MORE COMPLETE PICTURE, REVEALING THAT ZUCKERBUCKS WERE AN EVEN BIGGER PROBLEM THAN PREVIOUSLY ESTIMATED.

New Data Reveals Even More Zuckerbucks in Wisconsin

CTCL’s Form 990 revealed that Zuckerbucks were an even greater threat, with more than \$10 million flowing into the Badger State.¹⁰⁻¹¹


**TOTAL
ZUCKERBUCKS**

**2021
\$8,090,500
MILLION**



**2022
\$10,134,740
MILLION**

In fact, Zuckerbucks flowed into 216 municipalities during the 2020 election, covering more than half of the state, with funds pouring into 39 of Wisconsin’s 72 counties.¹²

ZUCKERBUCKS POURED INTO WISCONSIN IN 2020

County	Total # of Grants Awarded to Jurisdictions Within the County ¹³	Total Zuckerbucks Awarded to Jurisdictions Within the County	County	Total # of Grants Awarded to Jurisdictions Within the County ¹³	Total Zuckerbucks Awarded to Jurisdictions Within the County
Barron	10	\$55,000	Milwaukee	4	\$3,481,568
Brown	6	\$1,264,691	Monroe	1	\$5,000
Calumet	3	\$15,000	Oconto	5	\$22,213
Clark	2	\$10,000	Outagamie	3	\$28,330
Dane	13	\$1,379,066	Pierce	1	\$7,449
Dodge	2	\$10,000	Polk	4	\$20,000
Douglas	5	\$25,000	Racine	3	\$1,699,100
Eau Claire	2	\$76,000	Richland	2	\$15,000
Fond du Lac	7	\$77,491	Rock	12	\$316,440
Grant	12	\$63,561	Shawano	1	\$5,000
Green	1	\$5,000	Sheboygan	8	\$34,039
Jefferson	7	\$35,722	St. Croix	4	\$20,133
Kenosha	1	\$862,779	Trempealeau	2	\$10,000
Kewaunee	1	\$5,000	Vernon	2	\$7,938
La Crosse	2	\$8,000	Washburn	3	\$15,000
Langlade	1	\$5,000	Waukesha	7	\$78,022
Manitowoc	1	\$5,391	Waushara	1	\$5,000
Marathon	56	\$330,201	Winnebago	2	\$12,890
Marinette	19	\$95,133	Wood	3	\$18,583
Marquette	1	\$5,000	TOTAL	220	\$10,134,740

Source: Foundation for Government Accountability & Center for Tech and Civic Life

Zuckerbucks Flowed Into Democrat Strongholds

The five most populous cities in Wisconsin—Milwaukee, Madison, Green Bay, Kenosha, and Racine—received nearly \$8.5 million of the more than \$10 million in Zuckerbucks that were funneled into the state.¹⁴

These cities have traditionally been considered Democrat strongholds, resulting in more than 80 percent of the state’s Zuckerbucks flowing into heavily concentrated Democrat areas—with Biden winning by an average margin of victory of 37 points.¹⁵ Making matters worse, Milwaukee and Racine received a combined total of five separate grants from CTCL.¹⁶

Some Jurisdictions Did Not Spend Any Money on PPE

The leaders of the five most populous cities in Wisconsin claimed that without additional funding, they would be forced to decide between “health and the right to vote.”¹⁷ Despite this claim, only a fraction of the funds received was spent on PPE.¹⁸ In fact, Milwaukee spent less than six percent of its total grant on PPE.¹⁹

Meanwhile, some jurisdictions did not spend any money on PPE at all.²⁰ For example, Brookfield spent all \$14,090 of their grant on election administration equipment.²¹ And Menasha spent all their funds on absentee voting equipment and supplies.²² Green Bay spent less than one percent of their Zuckerbucks on PPE, and instead opted to purchase two new Ford trucks and pay a public relations firm nearly \$150,000 for voter outreach.²³



**MILWAUKEE SPENT LESS THAN SIX PERCENT
OF ITS TOTAL GRANT ON PPE.**

THE BOTTOM LINE: Wisconsin should prohibit outside money from financing elections.

The 2020 presidential election was proof positive that private funds infiltrating elections—no matter the amount—opens the door to outside influence that can impact the election and erode public trust. But fortunately, there is a way for Wisconsin to safeguard all future elections in the state. By prohibiting local governments from accepting private funding from individuals and third parties, Wisconsin can limit outside influence and restore public trust in elections.

Similar efforts are trending across the country. Indeed, 22 states, including nearby Iowa, Missouri, Ohio, and Nebraska have all passed reforms to secure their elections. Wisconsin can, and should, be the next state to safeguard their elections from outside influence.



By prohibiting local governments from accepting private funding from individuals and third parties, Wisconsin can limit outside influence and restore public trust in elections.



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