

Wyoming Secretary of State

Chuck Gray



August 10, 2023

Via U.S. Mail and Email

Re: Private Funding of Election Administration

Dear Wyoming County Clerks:

As Wyoming's 23 county clerks continue to prepare for the 2024 Election, I am writing to warn and caution against any attempts made by third parties to fund the administration of elections in Wyoming. This is especially imperative, given the influx of millions of dollars to initiatives, including the deceptively-named "U.S. Alliance for Election Excellence," that have set their sights and misleading tactics on local elections offices across the country. The Alliance is the latest attempt for third parties to influence election administration, following the troubling footsteps of the Center for Tech and Civic Life and the Center for Election Innovation & Research. These entities could also be used as a conduit for foreign actors to improperly influence American election administration.

In recent years, there has been an increasing and nationwide cause for concern when it comes to private groups funding elections. In the months leading up to the 2020 Election, the Center for Tech and Civic Life and the Center for Election Innovation & Research announced a commitment of \$300 million to state and local election administrators, citing the need for personal protective equipment amidst the government's response to COVID-19.¹ While approximately \$400 million was ultimately funneled to local election offices in 47 states, only small portions of grant dollars were traced to PPE and large discrepancies remain with reporting which funds went where.² A large portion of money did, however, go toward massive electioneering efforts which had nothing to do with COVID-19. Many of these grants came with significant strings attached, including the divulgence of elections operations, sharing of information, and being subject to "improvement plans" aimed at structural change of election administration.³

In this way, the recent and widespread influx of private funding of elections on a massive scale showcased the potential risk of undue influence and partisanship associated with utilizing private money to administer elections. In an article published in *Time Magazine* shortly after the

¹ Mike Allen, *Scoop: Zuckerberg, Chan Invest \$300 Million in Election Infrastructure*, AXIOS, September 1, 2020, <https://www.axios.com/2020/09/01/mark-zuckerberg-priscilla-chan-election-security>.

² Parker Thayer, Hayden Ludwig, *Which States did CTCL Flood with "Zuck Bucks"?*, CAPITAL RESEARCH CENTER, January 21, 2022, <https://capitalresearch.org/article/which-states-did-ctcl-flood-with-zuck-bucks/>.

³ Hayden Ludwig, *BREAKING: "Zuck Bucks" Pushing Progressive Policy in Elections Offices*, CAPITAL RESEARCH CENTER, January 20, 2023, <https://capitalresearch.org/article/breaking-zuck-bucks-pushing-progressive-policy-in-elections-offices/>.

2020 election titled “The Secret History of the Shadow Campaign that Saved the 2020 Election,” author Molly Ball not only admitted, but bragged that the election was won by “a well-funded cabal of powerful people,” who worked together “behind the scenes to influence perceptions, change rules and laws, steer media coverage and control the flow of information.”⁴

In response to the inherent risks and blatantly partisan nature associated with the rise in private funding of elections offices across the country, 25 states have enacted legislation which bans or otherwise restricts private funding of elections. During the 2023 Legislative Session, I worked with individual legislators on legislation which would ban private funds for conducting elections. Unfortunately, House Bill 224, “Prohibition on private funds for conducting elections,” was not advanced.⁵ While Wyoming law does not presently ban private funding of elections, I have asked the Joint Corporations, Elections, and Political Subdivisions Committee to draft legislation addressing this concern and that bill will be discussed on August 24.

Although critics have decried my ardent opposition to private funding of elections, touting the media’s common trope that “*this doesn’t happen here*,” we should remain ever-vigilant as these partisan tactics have spread across the country at an alarming rate, and affected similarly-situated states in evolving ways. Recently, for example, private groups attempted to target local elections offices in Utah in an effort to fund ranked choice voting initiatives across the state.⁶ These are similar to the groups who have pushed to introduce identical ranked-choice pilot programs in Wyoming, which I have testified against on numerous occasions, citing the many logistical and practical concerns associated with ranked choice voting.⁷ It was only due to Utah’s recently-enacted prohibition on private funding of elections that these structural grants were resisted. In other states, too, these groups are showcasing new tactics in an effort to disguise recent attempts to strongarm election administration.

In 2022, the Center for Tech and Civic Life and other groups funneled many more millions to an initiative with the Orwellian-named U.S. Alliance for Election Excellence, whose aim is to target local election offices by offering participants an extensive offering of grants, trainings, resources, and consulting services in an effort to “develop a set of shared standards and values” in elections offices across the country.⁸ It is important to note that a major benefactor of the Center for Tech and Civic Life, the New Venture Fund, has also funded other third-party groups attempting to influence election administration, including the Institute for Responsive Government and the Center for Secure and Modern Elections.⁹ Mounting evidence indicates the

⁴ Molly Ball, *The Secret History of the Shadow Campaign that Saved the 2020 Election*, TIME, February 4, 2021, <https://time.com/5936036/secret-2020-election-campaign/>.

⁵ HB0224 – Prohibition on private funds for conducting elections, 23LSO-0599, 2023 General Legislative Session, <https://wyoleg.gov/Legislation/2023/HB0224>.

⁶ Lindsay Aerts, *A group offered cities money to opt in to ranked choice voting. State elections office warns accepting that is likely illegal*, KSL NEWSRADIO, May 7, 2023 Updated May 9, 2023, <https://kslnnewsradio.com/2004591/a-group-offered-cities-money-to-opt-in-to-ranked-choice-voting-state-elections-office-warns-accepting-that-is-illegal/>.

⁷ HB0049 – Municipal nonpartisan rank choice elections, 23LSO-0191, 2023 General Legislative Session, <https://wyoleg.gov/Legislation/2023/HB0049>.

⁸ About Page, U.S. ALLIANCE FOR ELECTION EXCELLENCE, <https://www.electionexcellence.org/about>.

⁹ *Organization Profile: Institute for Responsive Government*, INFLUENCE WATCH, <https://www.influencewatch.org/organization/institute-for-responsive-government-irg/>; *Organization Profile:*

Alliance is a reinvention used to influence election administration and policy nationwide.¹⁰

The source of funding for many of these new efforts range from partisan groups to potentially foreign actors living here in Wyoming. For example, Swiss Billionaire Hansjörg Wyss, who as a foreign national is otherwise prohibited from donating to candidates or committees, has used two nonprofits under his control to pump hundreds of millions of dollars to advance a partisan agenda.¹¹¹² Wyss has also steered at least \$245 million to both the Sixteen Thirty Fund and the New Venture Fund, and the New Venture Fund has in turn given approximately \$25 million to the Center for Tech and Civic Life in 2020 alone.¹³ In other words, the Alliance has created a conduit enabling foreign nationals to potentially influence election administration. With the ever-changing landscape of new entities pushing their agendas on elections administrators nationwide, local elections officials are at a growing risk of these foreign influences should they accept funding in any way.

I feel it is my duty as Secretary of State to warn all 23 county clerks, and caution against accepting any money from third parties. It is also very important that Wyoming take action to statutorily ban private funding of election administration. Should any third-party entity or organization solicit county clerks to fund election administration, please notify me immediately for further investigation.

Sincerely,



Chuck Gray
Wyoming Secretary of State

Center for Secure and Modern Elections (CSME), INFLUENCE WATCH, <https://www.influencewatch.org/non-profit/center-for-secure-and-modern-elections/>.

¹⁰ *Zuck Bucks 2.0: The U.S. Alliance for Election Excellence: Exposing the Left's Latest Attempt to Influence the Election Process*, HONEST ELECTIONS PROJECT, https://www.honestelections.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/HEP_Alliance-for-Election_v5.pdf.

¹¹ Brian Slodysko, *Group Steers Swiss Billionaire's Money to Liberal Causes*, ASSOCIATED PRESS, April 4, 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/dark-money-democrats-wyss-politics-elections-601d40cd01569190559d545418afe396>.

¹² *Foreign Influence in U.S. Elections: How Swiss Billionaire Hansjörg Wyss and the Arabella Advisors Network Uses Foreign Dark Money to Sway American Politics and Policy*, AMERICANS FOR PUBLIC TRUST, July 2023, <https://americansforpublictrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/APT-Wyss-Report.pdf>.

¹³ *Organization Profile: New Venture Fund*, INFLUENCE WATCH, <https://www.influencewatch.org/non-profit/new-venture-fund/>.