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Washington's Republican News Site Gets Money from the Conservative Group Funding Anti-Trans Initiatives

A Reporter for the Site Is in Hot Water with the Attorney General's Office



BY JOHN STANG

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Credit: CSA Images

Two people financing efforts to stop a millionaires' income tax and to ban transgender girls from girls' sports are also financially backing the Center Square, a conservative national news operation with Washington State reporters covering those same measures.

Let's Go Washington has three measures on November's ballot—to repeal a new state millionaires' income tax, to ban trans girls from girls sports, and to modify student privacy rights in schools. Let's Go Washington is led by Redmond hedge fund manager Brian Heywood; one of the organization's top five donors is trucking executive Steve Gordon, according to Let's Go Washington's website.

Gordon and Heywood are the chairman and vice chairman of Project 42, a political action committee they founded to fund conservative ventures across Washington and elsewhere.

Between 2021 and 2024, the Chicago-based Franklin News Foundation, parent organization to the Center Square, was the top recipient of Project 42 funds. According to philanthropy.org, a nationwide donation-tracking website, it gave \$3.1 million. It's unclear how much of that money went toward the Center Square's operation in Washington state, but during those four years, Project 42 was the Franklin News Foundation's second biggest donor, about \$800,000 shy of the conservative Donor's Trust.

In 2024, the same year that Project 42 had four initiatives on the ballot, it [donated \\$1.2 million](#) to the Franklin News Foundation for "media investigative reporting" (Only one initiative, which forbade the state from banning natural gas, passed.) That was the first year that Let's Go Washington had initiatives on a state ballot.

What that money partly funds is the Center Square, a publication which concentrates on tax and business matters, but stretches into other political issues such as trans girls participating in girls sports. It opened its Washington operation in 2021, the same year that Project 42 was created. Project 42 [acknowledges the Center Square as an ally](#) on its website. The years after its founding, Project 42 donated more than \$798,60035 in 2022 and \$825,840 in 2023 to the Franklin foundation, according to influencevatch.org. No figures were available for 2021, 2025, and 2026.

"Donors don't shape our coverage," Center Square and Franklin News Foundation CEO Chris Krug wrote in an email to *The Stranger*. Federal regulations allow the Franklin News Foundation to keep donors' identities confidential. Krug did not answer a question about the size of the Center Square's budget for Washington state.

Heywood and a Project 42 spokesman did not return requests for comments.

While their donors may not shape coverage, perhaps the opinions and beliefs of the Center Square's reporters do. At least, that's what the Washington State Attorney General's Office thinks. The Center Square and Attorney General Nick Brown's office recently crossed swords over the non-work online activity of its reporter, TJ Martinell.

Martinell has written Center Square stories critical of the attorney general's office, including how the office [gave legal advice](#) to the Democrats while they put together a millionaires tax; how publicly requested documents [were distributed](#); and how many attorneys general, including Washington's Nick Brown, [coordinated lawsuits](#) against President Trump before he was re-elected. Martinell also has a virulently racist and misogynic digital footprint that Brown's office takes issue with.

On July 28, David Postman, Brown's chief of staff, wrote a long letter to Center Square CEO Chris Krug complaining about Martinell. Postman acknowledged that the attorney general's office is unhappy with some of Martinell's coverage. But his letter focused on the reporter's off-the-job activities, stating they weren't a good fit with an office with a high number of women and people of color on staff.

"I am alarmed by the writings and comments by Washington State Center Square reporter TJ Martinell on multiple social media channels and blogs. ... His stated views point to political biases, racial prejudices, misogyny, and conspiracy theories," Postman wrote.

Here is a partial list of examples listed in Postman's letter, which *The Stranger* has also confirmed.

First, Martinell is one of four co-founders of the [Masculine Geek website](#), the "21st Century men's club" which is a place for "masculine men to [discuss] history, guns, literature, women, art, or whatever else inspires them." That may not be all they get up to on there. One [Masculine Geek article](#) is a nasty first-person story (Martinell is not the writer) about a man degrading and abusing a woman with whom he was having an affair. It's not apparent whether the story is fact or fiction.

Second, Martinell [made a comment](#) on a Substack post that appears to discuss immigration. Martinell wrote: "Our grandparents didn't experience the largest human migration in human history. ... We have been expected to welcome people into our neighborhoods with 1000x worse intentions than 1942 Imperial Japan or Nazis Germany had for the USA"

Third, Martinell participates in Old Glory Club functions. The nationwide club is a far-right, antisemitic men's-only network, [according to the Guardian](#). During a [January Old Glory Club podcast](#), Martinell said:

* He wanted to go to Somalia or another country with emigrants going to the United States—and destroy its people.

* "Trump should be doing what he did to that Venezuela president to foreigners in elected positions in our country."

* Martinell also said Chicago-born Boston Mayor Michelle Wu has "got Chinese spy written on her."

* Indian immigrant men should be easy to deport because "they give white women the ick. ... They've probably interacted with more white women through adult films more than they've ever interacted with a woman in real life."

* Many churches and pastors are "communists" and some men wanting to be ministers are "gamma male mama's boys."

* Bad childhoods prompt men to enter interracial marriages. (Attorney General Nick Brown is the child of a mixed-race marriage.)

Martinell did not respond to a request for comment.

On Aug. 10, Krug sent a reply to Brown, stating while he didn't agree with Martinell's extracurricular online activity, it didn't influence his journalism at the Center Square.

"I find much of that (non-Center Square) commentary distasteful and indefensible. And I will make no excuses for any of it," Krug wrote. He explained that he had discussed this and the fact that "a journalist's participation in public discussion of contemporary social questions is not cleanly separable from his professional standing" with Martinell. "None of Mr. Martinell's commentary appeared in the Center Square, and none of it has any bearing on the accuracy of his reporting."

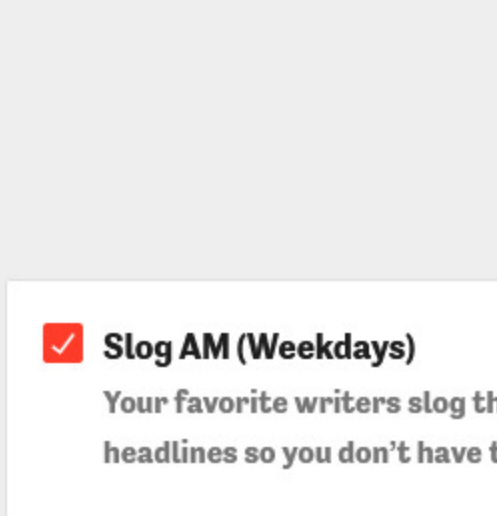
Krug strongly implied that these complaints are retributive. According to Krug, the attorney general's office is angry with Martinell's reporting that it provided legal advice to Democratic legislative leaders on how to write the millionaires' tax that would withstand the 1933 Washington Supreme Court ruling that's been routinely used to politically squelch income tax legislation for more than 90 years.

"An office of the State of Washington has now compiled a file on a working reporter. It cataloged his private speech across three years, timestamped to the minute. It transmitted that file to his employer. And it stated, in Mr. Postman's words, that he struggles 'with how our office should engage with Martinell given his commentary and rhetoric that is clearly out of bounds for a legitimate reporter,'" Krug wrote. "... It is not the business of the Office of the Attorney General to assemble dossiers on the private views of journalists, to determine which of them is a legitimate reporter."

Postman wrote that the attorney general's office will continue to cooperate with Martinell's future information requests. Krug wrote Martinell will continue to cover the attorney general's office.

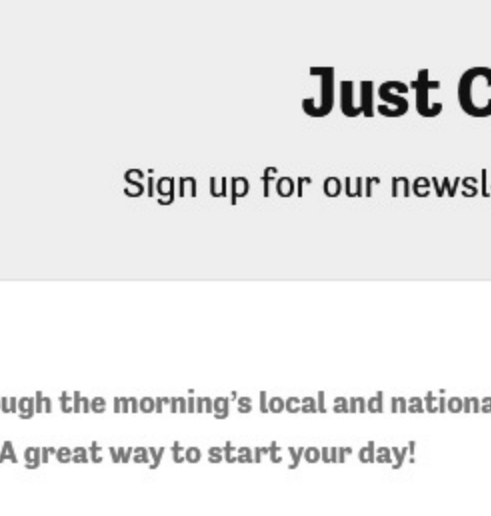
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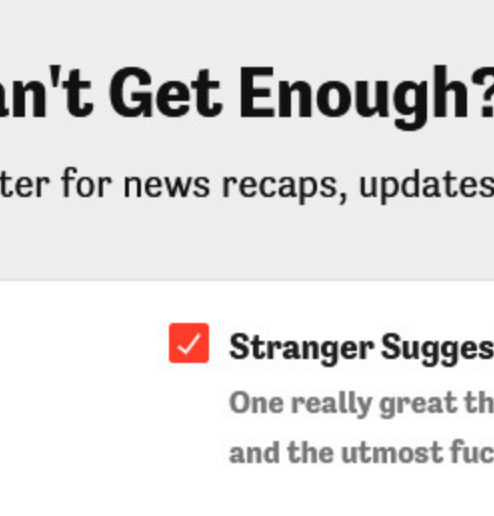
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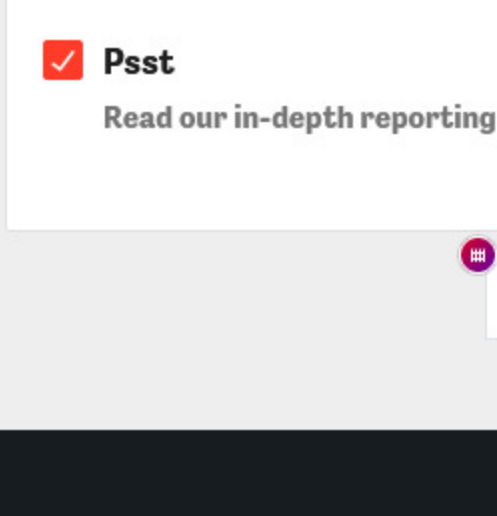
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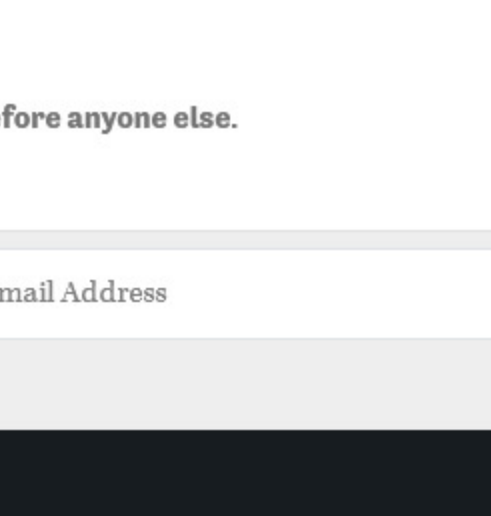
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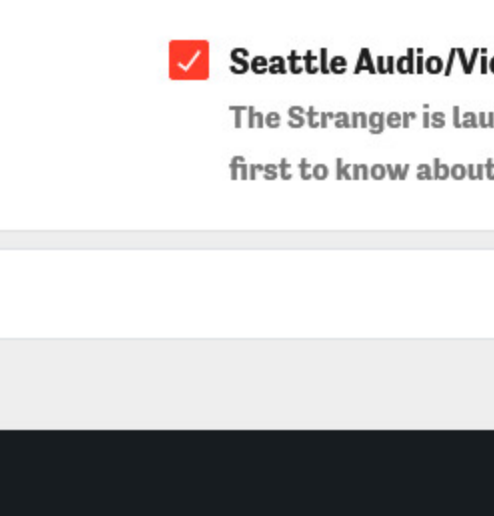
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