

U.S. Government Sends Billions in Taxpayer Dollars to Architects of Online Censorship



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The Foundation for Freedom Online reports that the Global Alliance for Responsible Media (GARM) members, which have been accused of censoring online speech and attempting to silence media outlets including Breitbart News, have received billions in federal contracts.

The federal government is sending billions of U.S. taxpayer dollars to four big global advertising agencies, which include some of the leading architects of online censorship, according to a [report](#) by the [Foundation for Freedom Online](#).

A congressional investigation recently uncovered overt political bias in the leadership of GARM, which is being used to control online speech and silence conservatives, the House Judiciary Committee said in a [report](#) released last month.

GARM co-founder Rob Rakowitz, for example, once complained in an email about people “advocating for freedom of speech online,” and about “extreme global interpretation of the US Constitution.” Rakowitz has also criticized the U.S. Constitution for being written “by white men exclusively.”

“GARM and its members discussed a strategy of blocking certain news outlets like Fox News, The Daily Wire, and Breitbart News,” the report added, pointing to an email from a top executive associated with the coalition stating that he “hated their ideology and bullshit.”

The congressional report went on to point out a number of incidents in which GARM has tried to punish any site or platform that strayed from “brand safe” speech:

A graphic for a Breitbart Business Digest subscription. It features the Breitbart logo (three slanted bars) and the word "BREITBART" in a serif font. Below this, "BUSINESS DIGEST" is written in large, bold, orange, italicized sans-serif letters. At the bottom, there is a white rectangular input field with the placeholder text "Enter your email address" and an orange rectangular button with the word "SUBSCRIBE" in white capital letters.

By subscribing, you agree to our [terms of use](#) & [privacy policy](#). You will receive email marketing messages from Breitbart News Network to the email you provide. You may unsubscribe at any time.

Other entities targeted by GARM include Elon Musk’s Twitter, now X, after it was initially purchased by the tech billionaire. The report states that GARM tried to direct all of its members — corporate giants like Coca-Cola and Unilever who together account for 90% of global advertising dollars — to “stop all paid advertisement” on the platform after Musk purchased it. The report states that GARM “bragged about” the fact that Twitter was “80% below revenue forecasts” after its effort.

GARM also worked to pressure Spotify over Joe Rogan’s podcast, the report shows, specifically over the host’s claims that young, healthy people didn’t need a COVID vaccine. Rakowitz, GARM’s leader, admits in private emails that threats like the one it made to Spotify “gets us into hot water by way of anticompetitive and collusive behaviors.”

John Montgomery, an executive at GroupM, the world’s largest media buying agency, wrote in an October 2021 email, “There is an interesting parallel here with Breitbart” after being asked about The Daily Wire, the House Judiciary Committee noted.

“Before Breitbart crossed the line and started spouting blatant misinformation, we had long discussions about whether we should include them on our exclusion lists,” Montgomery added. “As much as we hated their ideology and bullshit, we couldn’t really justify blocking them for misguided opinion. We watched them very carefully and it didn’t take long for them to cross the line.”

The committee report concluded that “GARM likely violated federal antitrust laws,” saying that it found “direct evidence” that it was “demonetizing certain viewpoints to limit consumer choice” and therefore harmed consumers.

“Colluding to suppress voices and views disfavored by the leading marketers at the world’s largest companies and advertising agencies is core to GARM’s founding principles,” the report stated.

A review of federal contract data by the Foundation for Freedom Online found that four of the big six global advertising agencies that make up GARM's membership — IPG, Omnicom, WPP, and Publicis Groupe — have collectively received billions of dollars from U.S. taxpayers:

Publicis Groupe subsidiary Plowshare Group LLC holds a \$394.2 million contract with the department of Health and Human Services (HHS), for the CDC's national tobacco education campaign. \$201.8 million of the obligated funds have been outlaid so far, with the contract set to expire in 2025. Publicis Groupe subsidiaries Sapient Government Solutions and OnPoint consulting, which specialize in winning government contracts, has also received hundreds of millions of dollars over the years from a variety of government agencies.

Omnicom subsidiary DDB Chicago Inc. holds a contract worth \$4 billion dollars over 10 years, to run the U.S. Army's marketing account. Omnicom subsidiary Ketchum also holds a \$247 million contract with HHS, to conduct outreach for the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. Another Omnicom subsidiary, GSD&M Idea City LLC, holds a \$741 million U.S. Air Force contract for recruitment ads.

Interpublic Group (IPG) subsidiary DXTRA Inc. holds HHS contracts worth over \$1.1bn. IPG subsidiary MullenLowe Global also holds a \$454 million contract to maintain the Department of Defense's Joint Advertising, Market Research & Studies program (JAMRS), which recruits for all branches of the military.

WPP subsidiary VMLY&R holds a five-year contract with the U.S. Navy worth more than \$455 million. WPP also owns Wunderman Thompson, the agency that has produced ads for the U.S. Marines for more than 70 years. WPP also owns GroupM, whose former CEO Christian Juhl recently testified before the House Judiciary Committee to defend GARM's actions.

"Together, these contracts represent billions of U.S. taxpayer dollars — all going to companies that have a demonstrated track record of trying to curb free speech on the largest social media platforms," Foundation for Freedom Online reported.

"In addition to their status as GARM members, each of these four global agencies has acted independently to curb or demonetize disfavored online speech," the foundation added.

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