



MEMORANDUM

To: Interested Parties

From: Sacha Haworth, Founder & Executive Director of The Tech Oversight Project

Re: Make Big Tech Pay: The Closing Argument on Data Centers

Date: October 5, 2026

A New York Times report just revealed that Meta claimed [\\$4 billion](#) through a federal tax writeoff to build data centers as “pilot projects” that had its own accountants concerned they were on “shaky legal ground.” Across the country, Big Tech companies have claimed billions in federal and state subsidies to build their [deeply unpopular](#) data centers – and left taxpayers holding the bill.

To their credit, Republicans saw the data center backlash coming. Almost every House Republican voted for [last year's H.R. 1](#), which expanded these tax breaks that Big Tech companies are now using to build data centers. So in August, the National Republican Senatorial Committee [sent AI companies a warning](#): data centers had become a massive drag on Sen. Jon Husted's reelection in Ohio, the committee wrote, and if he lost over them, politicians across the country “will not go near the next one.”

Tech CEOs heard the call, announcing they would pour [millions into battleground states](#) through their [web of Super PACs](#) tied to OpenAI and a16z's Leading the Future, but Republican candidates cannot shake the biggest drag of all: President Trump's need to surround himself with wealthy and powerful men means he is obstinately and very publicly siding with the tech CEOs. The leader of the Republican Party infamously declared that communities that reject data centers want “[to end up being backwards and poor](#).” That's fundamentally out of step with public opinion.

Democrats, by contrast, are seizing the opening, with [more than 40 political ads](#) across two dozen races – including in [key Senate races](#). The Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee and House Majority PAC are signaling to campaigns that focusing on cost of living and corruption is a winning message and contrast: Republicans who are bankrolled by Big Tech (the HMP research even cites a [Google check-drop](#) just before the vote on H.R.1) will vote the CEOs' way in Congress.

This message rightly points out the pay-to-play attitude the Republican Party has toward Big Tech. But that doesn't solve the cost-of-living crisis Americans are living through; voters demand solutions.

The [Make Big Tech Pay](#) frame, which The Tech Oversight Project has run since November 2025, turns voters' blame into a demand: the companies profiting from AI should pay for the

power they burn, not the family or small business next door. This framing works from Senate races to county commissions because data centers and their costs are fundamentally local – and because the tax giveaways are outrageous. A candidate can name exactly how much their state or county gave away to Big Tech, how much more families there are now paying, and who voted to allow it.

Key findings

TOP's state fact sheets document what data centers have cost thirteen states: the bill increases, the tax breaks, the jobs that money bought, the developers operating behind shell companies, the state's own polling, and the actions that need to be taken to end the ripoff and make Big Tech pay. The same four patterns show up in every state:

Families are paying – not Big Tech. Big Tech's power demand is landing on household bills. Data centers drove [63% of a record price spike](#) in the PJM capacity market, \$9.3 billion in a single year, billed back to every ratepayer on the system. In 2025, electric bills rose 16.9% in New Jersey, 12.1% in Pennsylvania, 11.6% in Maryland and 11.1% in Ohio. In Georgia, bills are up about \$43 a month since 2022, after regulators certified nearly 10 gigawatts of new generation built mainly for data centers.

States are giving away more than they promised. Ohio forecast \$136 million in data center tax breaks and gave up [nearly \\$1.6 billion](#) in 2025. Michigan passed its exemption on an estimate of \$2.5 million a year. Its own legislative analysts later put the cost at no less than \$15 million per data center. Virginia forgave \$1.9 billion in a single year. Georgia is out \$2.5 billion this year, \$1.1 billion of it local. Texas has gone from \$14.6 million a decade ago to a projected \$3.3 billion for 2028 and 2029.

The jobs aren't there. Data centers employ about one permanent worker per 5,000 square feet. Iowa gave Apple \$208 million for 50 jobs, more than [\\$4 million per job](#). In New York, a \$19.5 billion project in Genesee County is expected to create only about 125 permanent jobs, with roughly [\\$11.7 million in subsidies](#) for each one.

The secrecy is what voters can't forgive. Developers hide behind shell companies. Officials sign non-disclosure agreements. Companies sue towns that say no. In Mt. Orab, Ohio, the mayor and every village council member [signed NDAs](#) before residents learned a 1,000-acre data center was coming. In Tucson, Arizona, residents and county supervisors [didn't learn](#) Amazon was behind a \$3.6 billion campus until a month after the vote. In Effingham County, Georgia, a \$20 billion OpenAI project was approved [without public comment](#). Now, the governors of Pennsylvania and Virginia have both [banned state agencies](#) from signing data center NDAs.

Key messages: [Make Big Tech Pay Talking Points](#)

Big Tech can't spend public opinion away

Big Tech's answer to the backlash? Throw money at it. AI-industry super PACs and dark money groups [tracked by The Tech Oversight Project](#) have raised more than \$191 million and spent more than \$77 million this cycle. The Data Center Coalition, an industry trade group that represents Big Tech, created astroturf front groups with local-sounding names in eight states – but their ads never name the companies really behind them.

Despite all that, public opinion hasn't reversed: instead, opposition to local data centers in Fox News polling rose between July and September, all while the industry's ads were running.

Key polling

- [New York Times / Siena College: National survey](#), September 2026
 - Roughly two-thirds of American voters oppose data center construction, including 75% of Democrats, 60% of independents and 47% of Republicans.
 - On which party they trust more to handle AI and data centers, 41% say Republicans, 38% say Democrats, and 21% are undecided.
- [Fox News Poll: Voters question whether AI's promise outweighs its risks](#), September 2026
 - 71% of American voters oppose building AI data centers in their area, 46% strongly. When told that data centers could raise energy bills, voters become 29 points less likely to support construction.
- [Gallup: Americans Oppose AI Data Centers in Their Area](#), May 2026
 - 71% oppose a data center in their area (including 48% strongly) – more than the 53% who oppose a nuclear power plant nearby.
- [The Tech Oversight Project: Registered Voter Omnibus](#), December 2025
 - 85% want a law forcing Big Tech, not taxpayers, to pay the true cost of data centers.

State fact sheets

[Arizona](#)

[California](#)

[Georgia](#)

[Iowa](#)

[Maryland](#)

[Michigan](#)

[Minnesota](#)

[New Jersey](#)

[New York](#)

[Ohio](#)

[Pennsylvania](#)

[Texas](#)

[Virginia](#)

About The Tech Oversight Project

The Tech Oversight Project is a nonprofit organization and the only tech watchdog dedicated solely to research, rapid response, and aggressive media tactics that shape the debate around tech policy in Washington, D.C., and statehouses across the country.