

redstate.com

A right-leaning news and opinion website that has published false and misleading information, including about the COVID-19 pandemic, and regularly mixes news and opinion.



Proceed with caution: This website fails to meet several basic standards of credibility and transparency.

Score: 52/100

Ownership and Financing

RedState.com is part of Townhall Media, a publisher owned by Salem Media Group, Inc. Salem Media is a publicly traded company that describes itself as “a leading U.S. radio broadcaster, Internet content provider, and magazine and book publisher targeting audiences interested in Christian and family-themed content and conservative values.” Townhall Media includes the conservative websites Townhall, Hot Air, Twitchy, Human Events, and Bearing Arms.

Salem Media owns more than 100 radio stations in the U.S., according to its website, most of which are Christian talk stations, news talk stations, and contemporary Christian music stations. The company also owns more than a dozen Christian content websites.

RedState.com generates revenue through advertising, sponsored content, and subscriptions.

- ✓ Does not repeatedly publish false content (22points)
- ✗ Gathers and presents information responsibly (18)
- ✓ Regularly corrects or clarifies errors (12.5)
- ✗ Handles the difference between news and opinion responsibly (12.5)
- ✓ Avoids deceptive headlines (10)
- ✗ Website discloses ownership and financing (7.5)
- ✓ Clearly labels advertising (7.5)
- ✗ Reveals who's in charge, including any possible conflicts of interest (5)
- ✗ The site provides names of content creators, along with either contact or biographical information (5)

Content

The website primarily publishes U.S. political news and analysis, largely based on the reporting of other news organizations and on social media posts. The site typically adds its own conservative commentary to news published elsewhere.

RedState.com’s Diaries section features first-person essays and other articles from readers and contributors. Contributors have included the conservative think tank The Heartland Institute and conservative podcast Wrongthink Radio. RedState.com also links to content from its sister websites, including Hot Air, Twitchy, and Townhall.

Typical articles have run under headlines such as, “Kamala Harris Gives Ludicrous Reason As To Why Her Campaign Is Failing,” “Horrible People On The Left Use

Criteria are listed in order of importance.

[More information.](#)

13 Year Old Barron To Attack The President,” and “[GOP] Rep. Jim Jordan Replies to Ukrainian Whistleblower’s Offer to Answer Lawmaker’s Questions in Writing: Nope.”

Credibility

RedState.com rarely conducts original reporting and relies on reporting from other sites, including The New York Times, The Hill, and The Daily Caller. Although the site typically relies on many reputable sources, it has repeatedly misstated and distorted facts, including about the COVID-19 pandemic.

For example, a February 2020 article titled “NYU Professor Notes Coronavirus May Be ‘Bi-Phasic like Anthrax’, It’s Time to Press the Chinese for More Answers,” falsely claimed that the COVID-19 virus was stolen by Chinese scientists who were acting as spies for the Chinese government and working at the National Microbiology Lab (NML) in Winnipeg, Canada.

The article based its claim on an excerpt from a book titled “China Virus: Corona Pandemic, What Countries and Families Do,” written by an engineer named Joel Holmes. “Stolen materials, including samples of the Novel Coronavirus were somehow taken or shipped by this group of six to Wuhan,” Holmes wrote, as quoted by RedState.com.

PolitiFact, FactCheck.org, and the Canadian Broadcasting Corp. all concluded that there is no evidence that the COVID-19 virus was stolen by Chinese spies from a Canadian lab. The CBC did report that two Chinese scientists were escorted from the lab that month. However, the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) told the CBC that they were asked to leave due to an investigation of what it described as a “policy breach” and “administrative matter,” which was not connected to the coronavirus outbreak. “This is misinformation and there is no factual basis for claims being made on social media,” PHAC spokesperson Eric Morrissette told the CBC in January 2020.

The excerpt from Holmes’ book also falsely claimed that, “on May 4, 2013 the Novel Coronavirus arrived at the Canadian lab in Winnipeg.” The website linked to a

May 2013 report from CTV News, which reported that the Winnipeg lab cited in the story had received a sample of a coronavirus strain responsible for Middle East respiratory syndrome —not the COVID-19 virus, which would not emerge until late 2019.

In a March 2020 article headlined “Wuhan Virus and Bioweapons: The Past Is Prologue,” the site suggested that the COVID-19 virus was engineered, a claim refuted by numerous studies and experts.

The article stated: “But what about the origins of the Wuhan virus itself? Could it have been bio-engineered at the Wuhan Institute of Virology? This linked article is from a virology lab in India that first discovered HIV-1 protein inserts in the COVID-19 virus.” The article referenced research posted on the website BioRxiv.org, where users can submit scientific studies before they have been peer-reviewed. The study claimed to have discovered similarities between the COVID-19 virus and HIV, suggesting it was engineered. The RedState.com article itself promoted this theory, stating, “That suggests that the Wuhan virus was indeed manufactured.”

There is no evidence that the COVID-19 virus was manufactured in a lab. A March 2020 study published in the journal Nature Medicine concluded that the virus “is not a laboratory construct or a purposefully manipulated virus.” An earlier study, published in February 2020 in the journal Nature, found that the COVID-19 virus is “96% percent identical at the whole-genome level to a bat coronavirus.”

The site published five stories in September and October 2019, based on reporting by TheFederalist.com, which wrongly claimed that the U.S. intelligence community secretly eased a rule covering when whistleblowers can file complaints, in order to facilitate the whistleblower who triggered the House impeachment inquiry into U.S. President Donald Trump.

After The Federalist, RedState, and other conservative sites wrote about the whistleblower form, the Intelligence Community Inspector General issued a

statement saying that while changes were made to the form, the standard needed to file a complaint did not change. RedState did not correct or update its stories.

Another October 2019 story claimed that former U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Marie Yovanovitch “may have violated laws and government regulations by ordering subordinates to target certain U.S. persons using State Department resources.”

The story was based on a report by the conservative advocacy organization Judicial Watch, which cited an anonymous “State Department veteran” as its source. Apart from the anonymous source, Judicial Watch and RedState.com provided no evidence of the allegations against Yovanovitch, who testified in the House impeachment inquiry into President Trump’s Ukraine dealings.

RedState.com allows registered users to post content, which, according to the site, is “processed manually by our moderators, in order to weed out spammers and trolls.” Articles by RedState’s registrants are typically published in the Diaries section, but sometimes appear on the homepage as well. A disclaimer at the top of user-submitted stories states that their inclusion on the homepage “does not imply endorsement.”

NewsGuard found numerous examples of misleading user-generated content on the website.

For example, an October 2019 reader-submitted story, headlined “You’re Not Being Paranoid; The Trans Lobby *Is* Targeting Children,” stated that: “Numerous school districts across the United States in thrall to the LGBT lobby have classes in which activists instruct little boys and girls to cross-dress and ‘reconsider’ their gender – all without parental knowledge or consent. In Illinois, Democrat Governor Pritzker has made such instruction mandatory with no option for parents to opt their children out.”

Pritzker did sign a bill in August 2019 requiring history lessons in Illinois public schools to include study of LGBT figures. However, the bill makes no mention of

requiring classes to instruct children in cross-dressing and encourage them to rethink their gender, and there is no evidence that this has occurred.

Because RedState.com has repeatedly published misleading and distorted information, NewsGuard has determined that the site does not gather and present information responsibly.

Although RedState.com does not articulate a corrections policy, it runs correction notes at the bottom of stories.

RedState.com has an About page that describes Red State as a grassroots organization that aims to “educate conservatives, motivate conservatives to get involved in the political process, and activate conservatives through RedState.com’s support and tools.”

However, the About page is not directly accessible from any other page on the site and was only located by NewsGuard via a Google search. Therefore, NewsGuard does not consider this to be an adequate disclosure of the site’s point of view.

In addition, opinionated content appears throughout the site, including alongside straight news articles.

For example, in an April 2020 article, headlined “YouTube CEO Says You Better Parrot the World Health Organization or Face Removal,” the author wrote, “It’s obvious why YouTube is doing this though. Yes, it’s about being woke. All these social media platforms are founded and run by liberals. But it’s also about not giving the administration any credit for anything.”

In another April 2020 article, titled “Why These Guys Should Never Get the Presidency Back: DNC Spreading Lies and ChiCom Propaganda,” the author stated, “This is just one of the reasons why Democrats can never be trusted with power in the presidency again. Because it is never about protecting America or doing the best for the American people. But always and only about promoting their own power.”

An October 2019 story, titled “AOC Angrily Plays the Woman Card after News Reports About an Expensive Salon Visit. There’s Just One Problem,” about U.S. Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez’s visit to a pricey hair salon, stated, “As usual, AOC stepped on a rake bigly in a desperate attempt at deflecting a legitimate criticism. Not the first time, and won’t be the last.”

Because RedState.com does not effectively disclose its agenda or orientation on the site and regularly publishes unlabeled opinion, NewsGuard has determined that the site does not handle the difference between news and opinion responsibly.

Headlines on the site can be provocative and overheated, but generally are not false or misleading.

RedState.com did not respond to three emails sent by NewsGuard, including one sent in April 2020, seeking comment on its editorial standards, including how it vets user-submitted content and handles opinion. Townhall Media, which owns the site, also did not respond to NewsGuard’s phone call and three emails inquiring about those issues.

Transparency

RedState.com only discloses ownership by Salem Media Group in its privacy policy and terms and conditions pages, which does not meet NewsGuard’s standard for disclosing ownership in a user-friendly manner.

An Authors page provides biographical and contact information for some of Red State’s editors and writers. However, many staff members, including the top editor, are identified only with pseudonyms, which does not meet NewsGuard’s standard for disclosing information about editorial leaders and content creators.

Advertising and sponsored content are distinguishable from editorial content.

RedState.com did not respond to three emails sent by NewsGuard, including one sent in April 2020, inquiring about its lack of disclosure about its ownership, editorial

leadership, and content creators. Townhall Media also did not respond to NewsGuard's phone call and three emails, inquiring about these issues.

History

RedState.com was founded in 2004, purchased by Eagle Publishing Inc. in 2006, and acquired by Salem Media in 2014. The site was founded by conservative commentators Josh Trevino, Mike Krempasky, and Ben Domenech. Domenech is also a co-founder of TheFederalist.com, another conservative website. Conservative pundit Erick Erickson served as the site's editor in chief until 2015.

Contributing writers have included former House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, who wrote one of the website's earlier diaries. Then-Texas Gov. Rick Perry announced his presidential candidacy in 2011 at RedState's annual gathering in Charleston, South Carolina. A group of the site's contributors endorsed him for the presidency later that year.

RedState.com's position on President Trump has been a source of controversy. In 2015, the site's then-editor, Erickson, disinvited Donald Trump, then a presidential candidate, from RedState's annual gathering after he made disparaging remarks about then-Fox News anchor Megyn Kelly. In April 2018, Salem Media dismissed then-editor Caleb Howe and several writers, saying in an internal memo that the job cuts were "painful" but "necessary" for business reasons. Erickson and some RedState.com writers publicly stated that they believed the staff members who were dismissed were targeted because they were critics of President Trump.

In October 2019, RedState published a series of articles, as well as nude photographs and screenshots of text messages, exposing then-Democratic Representative Katie Hill's romantic involvement with a staffer from her congressional campaign. RedState's reporting helped spur a House Ethics Committee investigation into Hill, who resigned later that month. Hill said that the nude photos were published without her consent, thus constituting "revenge porn," and stated: "This coordinated campaign carried out by the

right-wing media and Republican opponents, enabling and perpetuating my husband’s abuse by providing him a platform, is disgusting and unforgivable, and they will be held accountable.”

Corrections: An earlier version of this Nutrition Label incorrectly stated that RedState endorsed former Texas Gov. Rick Perry for president in 2011. That endorsement came from a group of RedState contributors, not from the site itself. NewsGuard apologizes for the errors.

Editor’s Note: This Nutrition Label was updated on April 24, 2020, to include additional examples of the site’s content. It was previously updated on Dec. 5, 2019, to reflect that upon further review, NewsGuard has determined that RedState.com does not publish deceptive headlines. The criteria checklist has been adjusted accordingly.

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Send feedback to NewsGuard:[Click Here](#)

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