

Obama nominates for-profit prison consultant for US Marshals director

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In September, Obama nominated Stacia Hylton as the new director of the United States Marshals Service (USMS). Her nomination serves as an example of the anti-democratic ties between American corporations and government. Particularly troubling is Hylton's close relationship with the two largest for-profit, private prison companies, GEO Group and Corrections Corp. of America (CCA).

The office of the US Marshal is the oldest police agency of the federal government, created by the first US Congress in 1789. The USMS belongs to the executive branch of the federal government, serving under the Justice Department and the US attorney general. Its duties include apprehending fugitives, transporting federal prisoners, and providing protection for federal witnesses.

The US Marshals office has conducted a wide range of policing operations throughout its history. US Marshals and their deputies were deployed to recapture fugitive slaves under the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 and worked to suppress the Pullman rail strike in 1894. More recently, under the Bush administration in 2005, the US Marshals led a nationwide dragnet leading to the arrest of over 10,000 people across the US on outstanding warrants.

Stacia Hylton, Obama's nominee for director of US Marshals director, serves as a perfect example of revolving-door politics, where corporate employees are appointed to regulate their former employers, and former officials are given lucrative jobs consulting in the industries they regulated.

Beginning in 1980, Hylton has worked in the US Marshals Service in a number of capacities, including as assistant director for prisoner operations, as chief deputy for the District of Columbia, and as an instructor at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center. In 2001, she served as deputy director of the USMS.

From 2003 to 2010, Ms. Hylton held the position of

federal detention trustee, where she was tasked with managing the thousands of prisoners nationwide slated for deportation. During her tenure as federal detention trustee, GEO Group was awarded several high-value federal contracts to run detention centers, worth in total around \$85 million annually.

Within the past year, Hylton has leveraged the connections she made in her high-level government positions to get a well-paying job consulting for GEO. After only six months at her consulting job, she was tapped to return to the upper echelons of the government, completing one full rotation of the revolving door.

In January 2010, a month before she retired from her post as detention trustee, Hylton founded the consulting firm Hylton Kirk & Associates LLC. According to Hylton, she only began working for her own company in March. The only reported client of her firm is the same GEO Group that received valuable government contracts while Hylton served as federal detention trustee.

Hylton was compensated \$112,500, plus some undisclosed future payments, for her work, which she said included consulting on "federal relations." Despite the suspicious timing, there is no indication as of yet that Hylton and GEO supporting each other financially crossed any legal boundaries. Her connections to CCA, though, are indicative of her close connections to for-profit prisons.

As outlined by the Private Corrections Working Group & Prison Legal News press release, the president of CCA attended Hylton's retirement party in February 2010, where he, according to CCA's web site, "got the opportunity to speak with various USMS and ICE [Immigration & Customs Enforcement] officials."

Prior to her retirement as federal detention trustee, Hylton had already demonstrated her friendliness toward private prisons. In 2007, she objected to the recommendation in an Office of Inspector General's report that she develop guidelines for limiting the amount of profit that local jails could make housing federal prisoners.

This unbridled search for greater profits at public expense has found expression in America's ballooning prison population. With more people in jail providing more profits to private prisons, even friendlier relations can be expected between corporate prison operators and government officials.

Already in 2009, some of the closest connections between business and government came to light when two judges in Pennsylvania admitted to accepting more than \$2.6 million in bribes from a for-profit juvenile detention facility to give children harsher sentences.

Beyond a general conflict of interest, Hylton's nomination flies in the face of Obama's professed ethics rules that no political appointees "will be permitted to work on regulations or contracts directly and substantially related to their prior employer for two years."

When reached for comment by the *Washington Times*, a White house official took a narrow reading of these rules and said no special waiver was necessary because Hylton "could easily be recused from participating in particular matters in which [GEO] was a party." This is not the first time that the Obama administration has skirted its own ethics rules, with more than two dozen high-level appointees having received such waivers.



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