

Corporate sponsors underwrite Obama's inauguration extravaganza

Eric London
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Figures released by the Presidential Inaugural Committee last Friday reveal that corporate sponsors are bankrolling the official gatherings surrounding President Barack Obama's second inauguration later this month.

Providing support for red carpet events associated with the main inaugural balls allows the business elite to make good on quid pro quo arrangements established during the recent electoral and legislative seasons.

Included among the firms donating to the inaugural ball fund are Financial Innovations, a promotional products corporation that received nearly \$2 million in business from the Obama re-election campaign, and Centene Corporation, a Medicaid management firm that is a major beneficiary of the administration's health care overhaul.

Other donors to date include Genentech (biotechnology), Microsoft and AT&T. The Presidential Inaugural Committee is not required by law to release the donation amounts, although the committee has established a series of contribution levels, ranging from the "Washington" (\$1 million) and "Adams" (\$500,000) to the "Jefferson" and "Madison" levels of \$250,000 and \$100,000, respectively.

The decision to allow corporate donors to pay for the 2013 inaugural festivities is a shift from the policy four years ago, when such donations were banned. But after Obama's election to a second term, even this fig leaf has been removed. Corporate sponsorship for the celebrations surrounding the inauguration this time around seems to be the logical product of an election that was largely corporate sponsored. Obama and Mitt Romney, the two big business candidates, combined to spend over \$6 billion in the recent election, the most in history.

The official inaugural balls scheduled for the evening

of January 21 will come after a day of lavish invitation-only parties hosted by corporations whose offices line the inaugural parade route.

The inaugural events inevitably have religious overtones. The man who regularly pores over lists of those to be killed by drone strikes will most likely begin the day by attending a "Morning Worship Service" and, of course, will swear to "preserve" and "defend" the US Constitution, a document he has helped to shred, with his hand on the Bible. The tone this year is more religious and hypocritical than ever: the theme is "Faith in America's Future," and the Joint Congressional Committee on Inaugural Ceremonies website includes on its front page a list of Bibles used at past presidential swearing-ins.

The inaugural balls have been organized in 2013 in homage to the US military. Of the two official balls, the "Commander In Chief's Ball" is accessible only to members of the armed forces and will be a regular who's who of US imperialism. A third official event, the "Children's Concert," is being held for the spouses and children of members of the armed forces.

Aside from the official balls, dozens of other parties and celebrations are to be hosted by a myriad of government, business, non-profit and other groups. The Illinois State Society ball, chock full of Democratic machine bosses and Chicago socialites, will be funded by a \$40,000 donation from American Airlines and an \$80,000 donation from Exelon, the Chicago utility corporation.

The long list of similar events includes the "National Association of Minority Government Contractors Inaugural Gala," the "Black McDonald's Operators Association Inaugural Ball" and the "African American Church Inaugural Ball."

Many balls and gatherings, whose cost to the general

public might be up to a few hundred dollars, provide free tickets to members of Congress and other political insiders.

“These are Lobbyist-sponsored soirees to have a great time and schmooze with members of Congress and congressional staff,” said Craig Holman, a representative of Public Citizen, an anti-lobbyist watch group.

The day’s events are a pageantry of wealth and power that serve as the American ruling elite’s answer to a British coronation. Corporations and wealthy individuals spend inordinate amounts of money to underwrite an extravagant celebration of US military might, religious backwardness and the continuation of the Obama administration’s anti-democratic and anti-working class policies. As the elite gathers in Washington to rub elbows and trade horses, they will raise their glasses to another four years of war and austerity.



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