

Corporate donations to Trump inauguration top \$100 million

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The inauguration of Donald Trump as the 45th US president will be a celebration of wealth and privilege without parallel. Donations by corporations and lobbyists to Trump's inauguration fund have outstripped the amount raised by any of his predecessors.

In addition to the inaugural balls and presence at his swearing-in, there are multiple opportunities for those with the deepest pockets to dine "intimately" with Trump, Vice President-elect Pence, cabinet nominees and foreign diplomats.

On Wednesday, for example, donors can choose between dining with the vice president-elect at the National Portrait Gallery for the cost of a donation between \$500,000 and \$1 million, or an "intimate policy discussion" with cabinet nominees at the Library of Congress. Donors will be feted throughout the day with a series of events to reward their generosity, with access to Trump, Pence and cabinet nominees becoming closer in proportion to the payment.

In addition to the aforementioned dinners, donors will be treated to a Thursday night black-tie candlelight dinner with Trump and Pence at Union Station, a luncheon with "select" Cabinet picks and House and Senate leadership, a luncheon with "ladies of the first families" and tickets to the VIP ballroom at the Inaugural Ball.

Trump's inauguration committee has raised over \$100 million in donations. The committee has refused to report who has donated to which tier, but known so far include oil giant Chevron, which donated \$500,000, and Boeing, which pledged \$1 million—the same amount the company pledged to Obama's 2013 inauguration—after Trump publicly denounced the company's handling of an Air Force One contract. Casino magnate Sheldon Adelson and his wife Miriam

have reportedly donated an even greater amount.

Craig Holman, president of Public Citizen, an ethics watchdog group in Washington, told the *New York Times*: "This is nothing short of selling access to the president, the vice president and the cabinet. This is very unfettered, brazen selling of access. It certainly runs counter to any presidential candidate who was talking about draining the swamp."

Holman issued a somewhat similar criticism of Obama in the run-up to the 2013 inauguration. Obama had rejected all donations from lobbyists and corporations for his 2008 inauguration, for which he raised a reported \$53 million. He had also capped donations at \$50,000. For his second inaugural, amid flagging popular enthusiasm and a lower vote total, Obama accepted donations from corporations, and capped donations at \$1 million. Despite the cap, AT&T managed to contribute almost \$5 million, and Microsoft donated \$2 million. Chevron and Boeing each donated \$1 million.

Obama's 2013 inauguration represented a sharp break with tradition. George W. Bush had capped inauguration donations at \$100,000 in 2001, and \$250,000 in 2005. Not only that, Obama's inaugural planning committee in 2009 had released the names of all donors, the amount they had donated, their states of residence, and the companies for which they worked. In 2013, Holman pointed out that Obama had only released a list of names.

Obama's inauguration committee released final reports on the donations not one day earlier than the required 90 days after the event. Among the top 10 inauguration donors were telecommunications companies, securities and investment firms, oil companies and defense contractors, all of whom benefited during Obama's second term.

Trump has enlarged upon the Obama inaugurations—at least monetarily, in both magnitude of donations and in keeping the donations secret. While not illegal, the Trump inauguration certainly demonstrates in the crassest fashion the relationship between the presidency and the elites of the business world. Obama and Bush both offered tiered incentive packages to their donors. The packages offered by Trump provide even greater access to the wealthiest donors.

In early December, Trump used Twitter to publicly denounce aerospace giant Boeing, whom he claimed was inflating costs in its contract to remodel two Air Force One jets. Within a week, Boeing CEO Dennis Muilenburg had met with the president-elect at Trump Tower and pledged \$1 million to his inauguration fund.

After the meeting, Muilenburg stated he and Trump had “made great progress.” Trump expressed satisfaction with Boeing’s business acumen and pronounced them a “good company.” Boeing seemed to have emerged from the meeting with an advantage over rival Lockheed Martin.

Meredith McGehee, a government ethics expert at Campaign Legal Center, said of the process, “[W]hat is happening right now is that President-elect Trump is pulling back the curtain on what has been going on for a while.”

“These are all of the ways we have of raising money,” she stated to Politico.com. “He’s just doing it without shame or compunction.”

Perhaps the most succinct summation of Trump’s fundraising methods, though, is seen in Dennis Muilenburg’s statement after he pledged \$1 million to the inauguration: “I appreciate the teamwork approach on this—I think it’s the right way to do business.”



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