

# Clarence Thomas has lived like a billionaire in more than 30 years on US Supreme Court

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An investigative report published Wednesday by *Pro Publica* outlines the utterly corrupt lifestyle of Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas. The most right-wing of the nine justices, the most consistent advocate of the interests of the super-rich and enemy of democratic rights, has lived like a billionaire throughout his three decades on the high court.

The report, published under the headline, “Clarence Thomas’ 38 Vacations: The Other Billionaires Who Have Treated the Supreme Court Justice to Luxury Travel,” is a devastating exposure of corruption and criminality.

The report declares:

Thomas has secretly reaped the benefits from a network of wealthy and well-connected patrons that is far more extensive than previously understood...

During his three decades on the Supreme Court, Clarence Thomas has enjoyed steady access to a lifestyle most Americans can only imagine. A cadre of industry titans and ultrawealthy executives have treated him to far-flung vacations aboard their yachts, ushered him into the premium suites at sporting events and sent their private jets to fetch him including, on more than one occasion, an entire 737.

The gifts include “at least 38 destination vacations, including a previously unreported voyage on a yacht around the Bahamas.” This is better than one expensive vacation every year of Thomas’s 32 years on the court. In addition, there were “26 private jet flights, plus an additional eight by helicopter; a dozen VIP passes to professional and college sporting events, typically perched in the skybox; two stays at luxury resorts in Florida and Jamaica; and one standing invitation to an uber-exclusive golf club overlooking the Atlantic coast.”

These trips were largely unreported, either by the corporate media or by Thomas himself in his annual financial filings with the court. *Pro Publica* observes,

“Thomas appears to have violated the law by failing to disclose flights, yacht cruises and expensive sports tickets, according to ethics experts.”

At least four billionaires, representing several sectors of the US economy, have been identified as sponsors of Thomas. There may be others, but these four, as profiled by the *New York Times* and *Pro Publica*, include:

- Harlan Crow, heir to the commercial real estate giant Trammell Crow, founded by his father, which became the largest US owner of real estate. Harlan Crow controls the family holding company, Crow Holdings, with assets of \$20 billion.
- David Sokol, oil and finance executive, who made his initial fortune at Berkshire Hathaway, the massive investment firm founded and headed by Warren Buffett, before resigning in disgrace over an insider trading scandal.
- The late H. Wayne Huizenga, whose fortune derived from Waste Management, the leading waste disposal firm in North America, Auto Nation, once the largest auto dealer, and Blockbuster video. He also owned at one point or another most of the professional sports teams in Miami, Florida.
- Paul Novelly, oil executive, whose family owns the billion-dollar independent Apex Oil and several other oil industry firms, most involved in trading and storing heavy oil products, including fuel oil and asphalt.

What these billionaires have in common, besides enormous wealth, is an extreme right-wing political perspective, opposing any restriction on the capitalist market and any effort to provide state support for working people whose jobs and living standards have been devastated by market forces.

They were not “personal friends” of Thomas, as the justice claimed of Crow when his financial ties with the real estate mogul was brought to light by *Pro Publica* earlier this year. All four began their relationships with Thomas only after he had become a Supreme Court justice in 1991, when he was in a position to reinforce the drastic shift to the right in the high court which was already under way.

Thomas occasionally reported trips and gifts from Crow, but never for any of the other three, although these relationships were extraordinarily lucrative as well.

Huizenga twice sent his personal 737 to bring Thomas to South Florida, a flight that would have cost \$130,000 for the round trip. Thomas attended Miami Dolphins and Florida Panthers games several times as Huizenga's guest, during the period when the billionaire owned the football and hockey teams (which he later sold). He also flew in Huizenga helicopters and Gulfstream jets. But the biggest perk he received was becoming a frequent guest at Huizenga's Floridian country club, a resort so exclusive that it rejected Donald Trump for membership, when he was a mere real estate mogul and television personality.

Novelly's favored mode of transport was on the sea rather than in the air. He owned two yachts used for cruising the Caribbean and Thomas was a frequent guest. A Novelly chauffeur described picking up Thomas in the Bahamas, where he had flown in on the oil billionaire's private jet, and taking him to the marina where one of the yachts, *Le Montrachet*, was docked.

According to *Pro Publica*, "*Le Montrachet*, named after the premium French wine, is a 126-foot luxury vessel complete with a full bar, multiple dining areas, a baby grand piano, accommodations for 10 guests and a handful of smaller fishing boats and jet skis. Novelly charges about \$60,000 a week to outsiders who want to charter it." Thomas, of course, did not pay a dime.

Sokol hosted Thomas and his wife Ginni nearly every summer for ten years at his estate in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, the Paintbrush Ranch. He also entertained the Thomases at home football games for the University of Nebraska, using the \$40,000 sky box belonging to former Nebraska coach and Republican congressman Tom Osborne.

In a speech in New Orleans last October, Sokol denounced the limited student loan forgiveness plan announced by the Biden administration and predicted, "It's going to get overturned by the Supreme Court." Eight months later, the Supreme Court did exactly that, with Sokol's good friend Clarence Thomas voting to kill debt relief for impoverished college students.

The billionaires were well aware of each others' sponsorship of Clarence Thomas and occasionally collaborated. Thus Novelly, Sokol and Crow provided financing for a pro-Thomas documentary made in response to a critical film aired by HBO. On another occasion, Sokol and Thomas shared a lodge in the Adirondacks owned by Crow.

The revelations in the *Pro Publica* report would justify the impeachment of Thomas and his criminal prosecution. They would also warrant the systematic review of all of his

significant opinions and every case where his was the decisive fifth vote. This includes such historic and reactionary actions as last year's *Dobbs* decision, overturning *Roe v. Wade*, and the *Bush v. Gore* decision that awarded the White House to the Republican who actually lost the 2000 presidential election.

Nothing of the kind, of course, can be expected from the Biden administration or congressional Democrats. There has been no response from the White House about the *Pro Publica* report, and leading congressional Democrats issued blustering calls for Thomas to resign, and for the adoption of stricter ethics rules for Supreme Court justices.

But the Democrats seek to defend the key institutions of the capitalist state, of which the Supreme Court is one of the most important. Biden has already disavowed even such limited reforms as increasing the number of justices, derided as "court-packing" by most of the corporate media and all leaders of the Republican Party.

Most importantly, the Democrats have been completely silent about Clarence and Ginni Thomas's political connections to the fascistic conspiracies of ex-president Donald Trump. Ginni Thomas is not even mentioned in the special counsel's report on Trump, even though she was deeply involved in the effort to induce state legislatures to overturn the results of the 2020 election in their states and substitute Trump electors for the Biden electors actually chosen by the voters.

The Trump camp was counting on justices Thomas and Alito to play a critical role in this plot, expecting that any action by state legislatures to hijack the election might find its way to the Supreme Court. Alito, the justice who handles appeals from Washington DC, had in his possession on January 6, 2021 a motion to delay congressional certification of the Electoral College results, but he kept it in his pocket while awaiting the results of the violence on Capitol Hill. Thomas would certainly have supported such a delay.



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