More revelations of trips by Justice Clarence Thomas paid for by billionaire Harlan Crow

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New revelations surfaced on Monday of undisclosed private travel by Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas that was paid for by right-wing political activist and billionaire real estate developer Harlan Crow.

The revelations, which were made public in a letter by Democratic Senator Ron Wyden of Oregon to Crow's lawyer, Michael D. Bopp, cite Customs and Border Protection (CBP) records showing that the judge and his wife, Virginia Thomas, were flown between Hawaii and New Zealand and back in November 2010 on Crow's private jet. Crow was also a passenger on the flights.

Wyden's letter demands that attorney Bopp supply more information about the financial arrangements between Crow and Thomas. To date, Thomas has not responded to requests from news organizations to comment on the latest revelations. None of these trips was included on his financial disclosure forms.

In his letter showing that Justice Thomas and his wife have been travel guests on Crow's private yacht and jet, Wyden asserts that lawyer Bopp and his client Crow have engaged in an "evasive response" to inquiries about the billionaire's relationship with the Thomases.

Wyden states that the responses have "only heightened my concerns that Mr. Crow and his associates were involved in a scheme to avoid paying taxes by claiming business deductions on personal travel." The letter continues: "I am deeply concerned that Mr. Crow may have been showering a public official with extravagant gifts, then writing off those gifts to lower his tax bill."

In other words, Crow has been paying for lavish travel and accommodations for Justice Thomas and his wife and then charging taxpayers for these favors.

As becomes clear from Wyden's letter, the method used by Crow is a well-trod tax evasion scheme. The billionaire has been writing off the cost of trips on his yacht called *Michaela Rose* as "personal hospitality" paid to a shell company called Rochelle Charter. However, as Wyden writes, "Personal trips do not serve as a business purpose, which is required under tax laws to permit costs associated with the trips to be tax deductible."

Although couched in the oblique language of bourgeois politics, Wyden is clearly aware that Crow has been engaging in tax fraud. Wyden writes that "according to reports Rochelle Charter reported losses for more than 10 years, each year from 2003–2015, while it was still organized as an S corporation, racking up $8 million in losses during that period." The losses in his fake travel organization enabled Crow to avoid paying millions in taxes by offsetting his income.

Wyden further exposes the corrupt relationship of Clarence Thomas with Harlan Crow. He makes the point that Justice Thomas failed to disclose the 2010 trip to New Zealand, even though he had previously "amended disclosures to reflect other international travel on Mr. Crow's private jet."

Wyden's letter states that Thomas "enjoyed complimentary use of private jets paid for by Mr. Crow on 17 different occasions since 2016, with 9 of those flights coming in the last three years." Even though Thomas admitted to an eight-day voyage aboard the *Michaela Rose* in Indonesia in 2019, he has not reported other trips, while public reports show that "Justice Thomas was a passenger aboard the Michaela Rose in Greece, New Zealand and elsewhere."

Wyden cites a relative of Clarence Thomas as stating that he personally witnessed the judge traveling aboard Crow's yacht "in the Caribbean, Russia and the

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Baltics, with the trip to Russia also including helicopter ride(s)."

The *New York Times* reported on Monday that Michael Zona, a spokesperson for Crow, said the billionaire's attorneys had "already addressed Senator Wyden's inquiries, which have no legal basis and are only intended to harass a private citizen." Zona said Wyden's inquiry was part of a politically motivated effort to undermine the Supreme Court. He added, "We consider this matter settled and refer Senator Wyden to our previous correspondence."

In a response to previous revelations in April of last year of undisclosed travel paid for by Crow, Thomas said he did not need to disclose gifts of personal hospitality from friends "who did not have business before the court." He also claimed he was following the advice of "colleagues and others in the judiciary" on such matters.

Harlan Crow, chairman of Crow Holdings, with $29 billion in assets, has personal wealth of $2.5 billion. He is a well known far-right political activist and has officially donated $5 million to Republican campaigns and conservative groups. Crow is known to have a collection of Nazi memorabilia, including two portraits of Adolf Hitler and a signed copy of the Führer's *Mein Kampf*, at his residence in Dallas, Texas.

In addition to the trips he has taken with Clarence Thomas, Crow has given lavish gifts to the Supreme Court justice and his wife over a period of three decades, including a $19,000 Bible that belonged to Frederick Douglass. According to the painter Sharif Tarabay, Crow gave Thomas a portrait of the justice and his wife. Tax filings show that Crow gave $105,000 to Yale Law School for the "Justice Thomas Portrait Fund."

Direct evidence of the political connection between Crow and the Thomases was reported by *Politico* last September, when documents revealed that Crow had given $500,000 in seed money to establish Tea Party-affiliated Liberty Central, founded by Virginia Thomas. "Ginni" Thomas played a major role in Donald Trump's conspiracy to overturn the 2020 presidential election.

The rampant corruption and influence-peddling on the US Supreme Court, of which the relationship of Clarence Thomas and Harlan Crow is but one expression, is bound up with the role of the Court as an instrument of the financial oligarchy, a right-wing bulwark and a standing conspiracy against fundamental democratic rights.

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