



DEMOCRACY REFORM TASK FORCE WEEKLY NEWS ROUND UP

March 16, 2018

NATIONAL NEWS

[Trump Organization Says It Donated \\$151,470 in Profits to U.S. Treasury](#)

The Washington Post

The Trump Organization has donated \$151,470 in foreign government profits at its hotels and similar businesses last year to the U.S. Treasury, an executive said in a statement Friday. George Sorial, the executive vice president and chief compliance counsel, said the Feb. 22 voluntary donation fulfills the company's pledge to donate profits from foreign government patronage while Donald Trump is president. The company said last week that it had made a donation, but refused to disclose the amount. The Daily Mail first reported the figure on Friday. And while the U.S. Treasury has confirmed receipt of the check, it also did not provide any details. A representative for the Treasury declined to comment. The amount spent at the Trump-owned commercial properties became an issue of debate on social media as media organizations and watchdogs filed public records requests with the U.S. Treasury and lawmakers demanded answers. Ethics experts have challenged the methodology by which the Trump Organization determines its profits as incomplete and misleading.

[Defense Dept. Charged Nearly \\$140,000 at Trump Branded Properties](#)

CNN

Defense Department employees charged just over \$138,000 at Trump branded properties in the first eight months of Donald Trump's presidency, according to a CNN review of hundreds of records. Charges on the department-issued Visa cards, which span from Honolulu to Washington, DC, are the most recent evidence that taxpayer money flows to Trump's company, once again emboldening critics who say these payments violate ethical norms and possibly the US Constitution. The CNN analysis found military personnel spent more than a third of the total amount, or \$58,875.69, on lodging and food at what appears to be Trump's

Mar-a-Lago club in Palm Beach, Florida. Most of the expenses generally align with the 25 days the President spent at his Florida club from February to April.

**Related Story: [Pentagon Spent \\$17,000 at Panama Trump Hotel.](#)*

[Oil Group to Lobby President After Stay at Trump Hotel](#)

POLITICO

The oil industry's top lobby group is holding a two-day board meeting at the Trump International Hotel in Washington, D.C., before its executive committee goes to the White House to voice concerns about President Donald Trump's proposed steel tariffs, sources familiar with the meetings told POLITICO. The American Petroleum Institute's annual board meeting that started Wednesday could involve up to 200 people representing various oil and gas companies — including the top executives of major oil companies — paying to stay at Trump's hotel. It's not known how much API is paying to the hotel, which is controlled by the Trump Organization, the family-owned business headed by the president's son Donald Jr.

[Sarah Palin Coming to Mar-a-Lago for Palm Beach County GOP Dinner](#)

Palm Beach Post

Sarah Palin will keynote the Palm Beach County Republican Party's annual Lincoln Day fundraising dinner on Friday at Mar-a-Lago, the party announced today. There's no word yet on whether the venue's owner, President Donald Trump, will be in town this weekend to possibly drop in on the dinner. "Surprise guests are always welcome," says a county GOP advisory. Trump spoke at the county GOP's dinner at Mar-a-Lago as a candidate in 2016 and used the occasion to make news, pledging to publicly list potential Supreme Court nominees to assuage conservative concerns. Trump also attended the 2014 dinner at Mar-a-Lago, introducing keynote speaker Ted Cruz.

[Secret Contributions to Trump's Inauguration Become A Bonanza](#)

Open Secrets

The committee that ran President Trump's inaugural celebrations and surrounding events in January 2017 recently filed its annual tax return with the IRS, giving the public its first glimpse at how it spent the record \$107 million it raised in the months after the 2016 election. But rather than clearing up the questions that swirl around the committee — about charitable contributions, secret donors and massive vendors paydays — the filing only adds to the mystery. So OpenSecrets teamed up with the "Trump Inc" podcast, a partnership between WNYC and ProPublica, to explore some of these questions. We looked into suspiciously high vendor costs, which included a more than \$50 million payday for two firms,

and we trekked out to a small Virginia town to try to get to the bottom of what appears to be an anonymous shell corporation that gave \$1 million to the inaugural committee.

[Aides Blur the Legal Lines Between Partisans and Public Servants](#)

The New York Times

President Trump's social media director, Dan Scavino Jr., posted a message on his government Twitter account calling for the defeat of a Republican congressman who had angered the president. His West Wing counselor, Kellyanne Conway, weighed in on the Alabama Senate race during television interviews from the White House lawn. His son-in-law, Jared Kushner, used his White House title on a news release for Mr. Trump's re-election bid. All had complaints filed against them alleging violations of the Hatch Act, the federal law that bars government officials from using their positions to engage in partisan politics.

[Trump Cabinet Members Accused of Living Large at Taxpayer Expense](#)

The Washington Post

During a Cabinet meeting at the White House last October, President Trump extolled the virtues of the men and women surrounding him at the table. "A great trust has been placed upon each member of our Cabinet," he declared. "We have a Cabinet that — there are those that are saying it's one of the finest group of people ever assembled . . . as a Cabinet. And I happen to agree with that." Less than five months later, Trump finds himself presiding over a Cabinet in which a number of members stand accused of living large at taxpayer expense — often by aggressively embracing the trappings of their high government posts.

[White House Scolds Cabinet Officials After Embarrassing Ethics Report](#)

CNN

The White House held private meetings with four Cabinet-level officials last month to scold them for embarrassing stories about questionable ethical behavior at their respective agencies, sources familiar with the sessions tell CNN. Internal watchdogs have launched at least nine audits, reviews or investigations across several Cabinet agencies, and stories about first-class travel, expensive office furniture, and internal strife have become commonplace. Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke, Housing and Urban Development Secretary Ben Carson, Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin and Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt all met with officials from the White House counsel's office and the Cabinet liaison.

The meetings, held at chief of staff John Kelly's request, were intended to provide "a clear message that optics matter," the sources said.

[Secretary Ryan Zinke Accused of Mixing Politics with Official Business](#)

USA Today

Even the local newspaper thought it was odd when Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke stopped briefly last month at a small Pennsylvania town bearing a huge ceremonial check and the promise of millions of dollars to clean up abandoned coal mine lands. Zinke's visit to the East Bethlehem fire hall seemed hastily planned and "was baffling – to local residents, the media, and likely, those who planned his appearance," the Observer-Reporter wrote in an editorial. "You could call it a news conference, a town hall meeting, a political op," the paper concluded. "And you could call it something else: fake news." Government watchdog groups and at least two congressional Democrats say Zinke's trip smells of politics and seemed designed to benefit the GOP candidate in a special congressional election on Tuesday.

[Dormant Campaign of Top White House Official Paid Out \\$50K](#)

CNN

When Mick Mulvaney left Congress to join President Donald Trump's Cabinet in early 2017, he kept his re-election bank account alive and has spent more than \$50,000 from it since, including donations to several Republican lawmakers the White House was lobbying. A watchdog group and a former Federal Election Commission official say the account's expenditures raise ethical questions about how a senior member of the Trump White House used his leftover campaign funds. Mulvaney's campaign, according to filings with the FEC contributed to seven Republican members of Congress who have at times been on the fence over key White House priorities. His dormant campaign used funds for travel, direct mailings, strategists and catering at a private Republican club on Capitol Hill, according to the FEC filings. It also reimbursed Mulvaney himself for \$400 in travel expenses five months after he had joined the administration as director of the Office of Management and Budget. Mulvaney is also head of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.

[Emails Show Ben, Candy Carson Selected \\$31,000 Dining Set](#)

CNN

Newly released emails cast doubt on claims by Secretary Ben Carson and his spokesman that he had little or no involvement in the purchase of a \$31,000 furniture set for his Department of Housing and Urban Development dining room. Emails show Carson and his wife selected the furniture themselves. An August email from a career administration staffer, with the subject line "Secretary's dining room set needed," to Carson's assistant refers to "printouts of the furniture the Secretary and Mrs. Carson picked out." The documents were released following a Freedom of Information Act request from American Oversight.

[Pruitt Huddled with Coal Executive Who Raised Over \\$1M for Trump](#)

POLITICO

EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt met with an Indiana coal executive last year who was seeking to soften a pollution rule — and who once boasted about raising more than a million dollars for President Donald Trump’s campaign, according to documents provided to POLITICO.

The records, obtained by the Sierra Club through a Freedom of Information Act lawsuit against EPA, show that Steven Chancellor, CEO of White Stallion Energy, met with Pruitt on May 22, 2017 for a “courtesy call and introductory meeting.” Pruitt has met regularly with GOP heavyweights ahead of what many expect to be a 2020 Senate run. He has also met with investors connected to Republican megadonor Sheldon Adelson as well as key conservative groups like the Family Research Council and Federalist Society.

[Secretary of State Nominee Pompeo Owes Career to Koch Brothers](#)

The Quartz

Before becoming a US congressman in 2010, Mike Pompeo had patrolled the Iron Curtain, and started and sold two Kansas businesses, but never held office. When he ran, Pompeo earned the nickname the “Congressman from Koch” because of the outsized donations made to his 2010 campaign by the industrialist Koch brothers, whose energy conglomerate is headquartered in Pompeo’s Wichita, Kansas district. Koch Industries donated just \$80,000 directly to Pompeo—but that made them the largest contributor to his campaign in 2010.

[Trump Wildlife Protection Board Stuffed with Trophy Hunters](#)

The Associated Press

A new U.S. advisory board created to help rewrite federal rules for importing the heads and hides of African elephants, lions and rhinos is stacked with trophy hunters, including some members with direct ties to President Donald Trump and his family. A review by The Associated Press of the backgrounds and social media posts of the 16 board members appointed by Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke indicates they will agree with his position that the best way to protect critically threatened or endangered species is by encouraging wealthy Americans to shoot some of them. One appointee co-owns a private New York hunting preserve with Trump’s adult sons. The oldest son, Donald Trump Jr., drew the ire of animal rights activists after a 2011 photo emerged of him holding a bloody knife and the severed tail of an elephant he killed in Zimbabwe.

[Longtime Trump Aide Fired Over Financial Crime Investigation](#)

CNN

President Donald Trump's longtime personal aide John McEntee was fired because he is currently under investigation by the Department of Homeland Security for serious financial crimes, a source familiar with his firing told CNN. The charges are not related to the President, the source said. Minutes after news of his departure broke, the Trump campaign announced McEntee would be joining the reelection effort as a senior adviser for campaign operations. McEntee escorted from the White House on Monday, three sources with knowledge of the matter told CNN. Two sources said McEntee was pushed out because of issues with his security clearance, making him just the latest aide to be forced out because of difficulties obtaining a full security clearance.

**Related Story: [Trump Campaign & Outside Group Becoming "Soft Landings" for Loyalists.](#)*

[WH Disregarded Republican Investigators' Requests](#)

McClatchy

The White House has refused to comply with all three investigations by the Republican-controlled House into the questionable behavior of President Donald Trump's top aides, including Cabinet secretaries and son-in-law, Jared Kushner. And Republicans on the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee are being criticized for accepting no for an answer rather than subpoena the documents. The investigations involve three of the biggest controversies at the White House since Trump took office — aides using private email for government business, spending taxpayer money on costly private airplane travel and holding interim security clearances for long periods of time while handling the nation's secrets. Now, the highest-ranking Democrat on the committee wants to go further. Rep. Elijah Cummings, sent a pair of letters to chairman Trey Gowdy this week urging him to issue subpoenas for documents about private emails and travel. He sent a similar one last week pushing for a subpoena for records on security clearances.

[Trump Jr. Partners with Donor Who Pitched Government](#)

The Associated Press

Donald Trump Jr. and Texas hedge fund manager Gentry Beach have long claimed they're just friends. But records obtained by The Associated Press show the president's eldest son and the Republican donor have a previously undisclosed business relationship. Scrutiny of the business ties comes as Beach has gained access to top government officials since President Trump took office. Last year, Beach met with top National Security Council officials and with Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke. Court testimony shows Trump Jr. has been involved in business deals with Gentry since the mid-2000s. In October they formed a company together.... Ethics experts said their financial entanglements raised questions about whether Beach's access to

government officials and advocacy for policy changes were made possible by the president's son's influence — and could also benefit the Trump family's bottom line.

[Ivanka Never Cut Ties with the Trump Organization](#)

McClatchy

Donald Trump isn't the only Trump with potential conflicts of interest in the White House. Ivanka Trump — a senior White House adviser who is doing everything from lobbying the Senate on tax policy to representing her father at a G20 summit of world leaders — will pull in more than \$1 million a year from the family business that has continued to develop luxury resorts across the globe during the Trump presidency. Some of those Trump-branded developments are hiring state-owned companies for construction, receiving gifts from foreign governments in the form of public land or eased regulations and accepting payments from customers who are foreign officials. Ivanka Trump's continued relationship with the businesses affiliated with the Trump Organization creates countless potential conflicts of interest prohibited by federal law and federal ethics standards as she works as a special assistant to the president. And just like her father, she is being accused of violating the so-called emoluments clause of the U.S. Constitution that forbids government officials — not just presidents — from accepting gifts from foreign governments without the approval of Congress.

[Out of Public View, Trumps and Kushners Are Talking Business](#)

The New York Times

Jared Kushner's family company recently began construction on an oceanfront development in this Jersey Shore city, a project that has the strong backing of local officials, who agreed to support it with \$20 million in bonds. But unknown to Long Branch officials, the Kushners have been in talks to team up with another family-run company that has an even bigger presence in the White House: the Trump Organization. The Kushners are in private discussions to have President Trump's company manage at least one hotel at the center of the development known as Pier Village, according to people briefed on the previously unreported talks. The Kushner Companies and the Trump Organization have signed a letter of intent, though no deal is final and the Kushners are not required to inform city officials.

[Trump Has Shown Little Interest in Beefing Up the FEC](#)

The Washington Post

More than a year into his presidency, President Trump has shown little interest in beefing up the Federal Election Commission, the agency that could serve as a key player in his avowed agenda to reduce the influence of moneyed interests on politics. So far, Trump has nominated just one new commissioner to fill the two open spots on the panel. He has the opportunity to

name an entirely new slate. The remaining four commissioners are serving on expired terms, two of which ended as long as a decade ago. If one more leaves without being replaced, the FEC will lack a quorum and be effectively paralyzed. As a presidential candidate, Trump blasted the influence of wealthy donors, criticized opponents for skirting limits on coordinating with their super PACs and said he would overhaul the “rigged” campaign finance system.

[Trump Wants New Authority Over Polling Places. Officials Say No.](#)

The Boston Globe

President Trump would be able to dispatch Secret Service agents to polling places nationwide during a federal election, a vast expansion of executive authority, if a provision in a Homeland Security reauthorization bill remains intact. The rider has prompted outrage from more than a dozen top elections officials around the country, including Secretary of State William F. Galvin of Massachusetts, a Democrat, who says he is worried that it could be used to intimidate voters and said there is “no basis” for providing Trump with this new authority.

[New Evidence the Daniels Payment May Have Violated Election Law](#)

The Washington Post

One short, newly revealed email from a Manhattan banker just made it much more likely that the \$130,000 payment to porn star Stormy Daniels shortly before the 2016 election violated federal law. NBC News on Friday reported that Michael Cohen, President Trump’s longtime ally and attorney, had used a Trump Organization email address as he worked to secure the payment to Daniels. Daniels alleges the money was paid to keep her from telling the media about a sexual relationship she had with Trump; Cohen and Trump continue to deny that relationship. In particular, NBC received a copy of an email from a banker at First Republic Bank that was sent to Cohen. Cohen then forwarded the email to his private Gmail account and, from there, to Daniels’s attorney.... The banker emailed Cohen at mcohen@trumporg.com. Trumporg.com redirects to Trump.com. The domain is registered to the Trump Organization. It is, in other words, an email address that belongs to the Trump Organization — an asset of the company.... That means that federal election law was almost certainly violated.

**Related Story: [Trump Organization Tied to Deal to Keep Ex-Porn Star Quiet.](#)*

**Related Story: [Hearing Set in Stormy Daniels' Lawsuit Against Trump.](#)*

[Rep. Member of House Intel Committee Says It Has 'Lost All Credibility'](#)

CNN

After the House intelligence committee announced it was shutting down its probe into possible collusion between the Trump campaign and Russia, a Republican who sits on it said he

believes the committee has lost its credibility. "We have gone completely off the rails, and now we're basically a political forum for people to leak information to drive the day's news," GOP Rep. Tom Rooney said during an interview on CNN's "Erin Burnett OutFront."

**Related Story: [House Republicans Break with Intelligence Community on Russia](#).*

[Dems Back Financial Deregulation Bill Have Money Invested in Big Banks](#)

TYT Investigates

TYT Investigates has found that seven of the 17 Democratic-caucusing senators who voted to advance a financial deregulation bill on Tuesday have direct investments totaling as much as \$2.5 million in the corporate stocks of companies that stand to benefit considerably from the bill in its current state, according to financial disclosure documents. Sens. Heidi Heitkamp (D-N.D.), Claire McCaskill (D-Mo.), Joe Manchin (D-W.Va.), and others key to the bill's advancement could all benefit financially from it.

IN THE STATES

[D.C. Mayor Signs Law Creating Publicly Financed Campaigns](#)

The Washington Post

D.C. Mayor Muriel E. Bowser (D) has signed a law that will create publicly financed elections, reversing her previous opposition to a plan that advocates say will help curb money's influence in District politics. Bowser announced that she was throwing her support behind the Fair Elections Act, which was approved unanimously by the D.C. Council in February. The law, which will first affect elections in 2020, will steer millions annually toward the campaigns of local candidates and is aimed at reducing their reliance on deep-pocketed donors. Bowser had previously threatened not to fund the legislation, saying the money would be better spent on city services than on political campaigns. But as she signed the bill Tuesday, the mayor indicated that she had been convinced that the program has widespread support.

KEY OPINION

[Six Ways Trump Can Help Stop Russian Meddling](#)

CNN (Op-Ed by Norm Eisen and Fred Wertheimer)

There is legitimate concern that Russia may again use false and misleading online ads, fake news and phony websites, bots, stolen American identities and the like to disrupt selected races and favor particular candidates. And if Trump does not take swift action to address this threat, then he will be acting as a major roadblock to the security of our nation and the legitimacy of our elections.... To serve as a benchmark, let's look at what a president would do if he actually cared about protecting our country against Russia or another foreign power sabotaging our elections. 1) A president would issue a government-wide directive instructing the administration to prioritize the prevention of future attacks on our elections by Russia or other foreign or hostile interests; 2) He would hold a public summit to explore ways to respond to Russia. This summit would include the CEOs of Facebook ,Twitter and Google; 3) A president would impose stiff sanctions on Russia without loopholes; 4) He would submit a package of legislative solutions and call on Congress to enact the solutions as a top priority. to any foreign interest that attempts to interfere with our elections; 5) He would submit an emergency funding request to Congress and demand prompt action; 6) His administration would provide periodic reports to the country on the progress being made to stop Russia or any other foreign interest from interfering in our elections.

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