

‘Can You Say Corruption?’ Puerto Rico Contract for Trump-Connected Raises Concerns

Tiny company financed by a major donor to the Trump campaign and the Republican Party awarded no-bid contract to rebuild energy grid

By [Julia Conley](#)

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Featured image: Puerto Rico’s electricity utility, PREPA, offered a \$300 million contract to a small private firm to repair its power grid. Whitefish Energy is funded by a major Trump donor. (Photo: Whitefish Energy/Twitter)

Critics raised suspicions on Tuesday over a \$300 million no-bid contract that was awarded to a small, two-year-old private energy company to restore Puerto Rico’s electrical grid. The company is financed by a major donor to the Trump campaign and the Republican Party, and also has connections to Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke.

Whitefish had TWO full-time employees the day Maria hit Puerto Rico. Can you say corruption? <https://t.co/lh2B1UuSEB>

— Chris Barca (@CBarcaQC) [October 24, 2017](#)

Spoiler alert! The energy company is based in Whitefish, Montana, hometown of Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke, whose son worked for its CEO. <https://t.co/O7JSMiFldr>

— Scott Bixby (@scottbix) [October 24, 2017](#)

Whitefish Energy, based in Whitefish, Montana, had only two full-time employees when Hurricane Maria hit Puerto Rico over a month ago, leaving about 75 percent of the island still [without](#) power.

State utilities on the U.S. mainland have helped power authorities like Puerto Rico’s recover quickly from disasters like Maria in the past through mutual aid agreements, leaving many to wonder why Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority (PREPA) would rely on a company that has no experience with extensive restoration projects.

“The fact that there are so many utilities with experience in this and a huge track record of helping each other out, it is at least odd why PREPA would go to Whitefish,” said Susan F. Tierney, a former Energy Department official, in an [interview](#) with the Washington Post.

As the *Daily Beast* [reported](#), Federal Election Commission filings show that the founder of the private equity firm that finances Whitefish Energy donated \$20,000 to a pro-Trump PAC during the 2016 election as well as more than \$30,000 to the Republican National Committee.

The company is also run by a contact of Zinke's—Andy Techmanski—who once hired the Interior Secretary's son for a summer job. Zinke is from Whitefish, but his office told the *Post* that he only knows Techmanski because "everybody knows everybody" in the small town.

Whitefish has hired nearly 300 workers from across the country so far to help repair the infrastructure. According to Aaron C. Davis, investigative reporter for the *Post*, the company is charging PREPA hundreds of dollars per hour for their subcontractors' work, far more than average rates.

A House Committee with oversight of PR bankruptcy says it is concerned about deal. Lawmakers may be more concerned when they price tag: pic.twitter.com/IRga9jsGws

— Aaron C. Davis (@byaaroncdavis) [October 24, 2017](#)

Whitefish is charging \$300+ per hour for lineman to do the work that utilities from states offered through mutual aid.

— Aaron C. Davis (@byaaroncdavis) [October 24, 2017](#)

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