

# DNC Emails Released by Wikileaks Reveal Democratic Party Insiders Promised Donors Access to Obama in Exchange for Cash

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Wealthy potential donors to the Democratic National Committee (DNC) were courted with promises of access to the president, a *Washington Post* [analysis](#) of internal DNC emails [released](#) by WikiLeaks has found. The party insiders' pitches appear to be in violation of White House policy, the newspaper notes.

On Monday, the *Post* reported:

The DNC emails show how the party has tried to leverage its greatest weapon—the president—as it entices wealthy backers to bankroll the convention and other needs. At times, DNC staffers used language in their pitches to donors that went beyond what lawyers said was permissible under a White House policy designed to prevent any perception that special interests have access to the president.

Top aides also get involved in wooing contributors, according to the emails. White House political director David Simas, for instance, met in May with a half-dozen top party financiers in Chicago, including Fred Eychaner, one of the top Democratic donors in the country, the documents show.

On at least one occasion, a White House lawyer asked DNC employees to alter the language of an invitation to a high-dollar event so it would not appear to be soliciting donations in exchange for access to President Barack Obama—demonstrating that employees were made aware of the policy.

“Let’s remove the word round table on page 2 at the top (‘\$33,400 – Round table discussion guest’). As you know, WH policy restricts the use of language that gives the appearance that contributors can pay for policy access to the President,” Ruthzee Louijeune, an associate at Perkins Coie LLC, [wrote](#) to a DNC staffer in reference to a May event featuring Obama.

The *Post* noted, however, that “the emails show several instances in which DNC fundraisers pitched donors with promises of a ‘roundtable’ chat with Obama. On May 6, the southern finance director emailed Cockrum, [a] Tennessee donor, about packages available for the Philadelphia convention.”

The newspaper continues:

“If [you] were willing to contribute \$33,400 we can bump you up a level to the

Fairmont,” [the southern finance director] wrote, referring to a luxury hotel. “Additionally, your generous contribution would allow you to attend a small roundtable we are having with President Obama in DC on May 18th or a dinner in NYC on June 8th.”

On the afternoon of the event, the place of honor, at Obama’s side, went to New York philanthropist Phil Munger. Kaplan noted to Shapiro in an email that Munger was one of the largest donors to Organizing for Action, a nonprofit group that advocates for Obama’s legislative agenda.

“It would be nice to take care of him from the DNC side,” Kaplan wrote, adding: “He is looking to give his money in new places and I would like that to be to us.”

The Democratic Party collected hundreds of thousands of dollars for a single dinner with the president. On May 24, an [email](#) with the subject line “Daily Number” gave the donation tally at that point for a June 8 dinner in New York, hosted by venture capitalist and *Huffington Post* co-founder [Kenneth Lerer](#), with the president in attendance:

Guests  
48

Committed  
\$143,400

In Hand  
\$576,113

Total  
\$719,513

Not only does the DNC appear to be pitching access to the president in exchange for donations, a *McClatchy* [investigation](#) on Thursday also revealed that large-ticket donors often demand such special favors. It also found that DNC insiders attempted to find ways to appease such donors—occasionally arguing about which donor deserved a reward more.

*McClatchy* reports:

In one exchange, National Finance Director Jordan Kaplan and Mid-Atlantic Finance Director Alexandra Shapiro argue which contributor should be allowed to sit next to Obama at a DNC event.

Kaplan told Shapiro to move Maryland ophthalmologist Sreedhar Potarazu and give the seat to New York philanthropist Philip Munger because he is the largest donor to Organizing for America, a group that pushes Obama’s policies. “It would be nice to take care of him from the DNC side,” Kaplan wrote.

But Shapiro explained that the Potarazu family had contributed \$332,250 while Munger had only donated \$100,600.

Both the DNC and the Republican National Convention (RNC) have “stepped up their hunt for huge checks since a series of legal changes in 2014 [gave them leeway](#) to collect expansive contributions for new accounts to pay for building, legal and convention

expenses,” the *Post* observes.

The *Post* reports that in addition, in 2015 “the DNC, in consultation with Clinton’s campaign, also decided to reverse a ban on donations from the PACs of corporations, unions and other groups.”

Former DNC chairwoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz, who announced her [resignation](#) on Sunday after the leak revealed the DNC [favoring](#) Hillary Clinton’s presidential campaign over Bernie Sanders’, [actively solicited large donations from super PACs and lobbyists](#) after the new rules were established.

“After those limits were lifted,” the newspaper continues, Schultz “and other top party officials showered corporate lobbyists with calls, emails and personal meetings seeking convention support and PAC contributions to the party, according to a spreadsheet logging the contacts.”

And the resulting donations have been quite significant—particularly when it came to funds solicited to pay for the party convention in Philadelphia. The *Post* writes:

The top-tier donor package for this week’s Democratic National Convention required a donor to raise \$1.25 million or give \$467,600 since January 2015, according to a document in the emails. In return, a contributor got booking in Philadelphia at a premier hotel, VIP credentials and six slots at “an exclusive roundtable and campaign briefing with high-level Democratic officials,” according to the terms.

Those perks were aggressively pushed to donors this spring as DNC staffers worked to try to pay for the party’s share of the convention, a tab that had been covered by public funds in previous years.

The DNC also appeared to look for ways around the remaining rules that limited donations, in search of more contributions: “When Pietrzak, who had already given his annual maximum to the party, expressed interest in attending the May 18 event with Obama,” the *Post* notes, “a party staffer [responded](#) to her colleague: ‘No chance of getting more \$ out of them, is there? Push the convention packages as an incentive?’”

Such revelations appear to confirm the [argument](#) that relying on large donations from wealthy individuals and large corporations inevitably leads to corruption of the political process. Indeed, both Bernie Sanders and Green Party presumptive presidential nominee Jill Stein have condemned the DNC’s fundraising practices and called for campaign finance reform:



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