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Firms Paid Bill Clinton Millions As They Lobbied Hillary Clinton

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Hillary Clinton has backed away from her husband's political legacy. She and Bill Clinton are pictured here at the closing plenary session of the seventh annual meeting of the Clinton Global Initiative at the Sheraton New York Hotel on Sept. 22, 2011. Photo: Getty Images/Daniel Berehulak



Former President Bill Clinton accepted a total of \$2.5 million in speaking fees from companies lobbying the State Department under Hillary Clinton. Pictured: The Clintons hold up some steaks at the 37th Harkin Steak Fry in Indianola, Iowa, Sept. 14, 2014. Photo: Reuters/Jim Young/Files

Former President Bill Clinton accepted more than \$2.5 million in speaking fees from 13 major corporations and trade associations that lobbied the U.S. State Department while Hillary Clinton was secretary of state, an International Business Times investigation has found. The fees were paid directly to the former president, and not directed to his philanthropic foundation.

Many of the companies that paid Bill Clinton for these speeches -- a roster of global giants that includes Microsoft, Oracle and Dell -- engaged him within the same three-month period in which they were also lobbying the State Department in pursuit of their policy aims, federal disclosure documents show. Several companies received millions of dollars in State Department contracts while Hillary Clinton led the institution.

The disclosure that President Clinton received personal payments for speeches from the same corporate interests that were actively seeking to secure favorable policies from a federal department overseen by his wife underscores the vexing issue now confronting her presidential aspirations: The Clinton family is at the center of public suspicions over the extent of insider dealing in Washington, emblematic of concerns that corporate interests are able to influence government action by creatively funneling money to people in power.

"The dynamic is insidious and endemic to this system," said Meredith McGhee, policy director of the Campaign Legal Center, a campaign finance watchdog group in Washington. "The fact is

that the wealthiest .01 percent on the outside of government believes -- fervently -- that by paying speaking fees, or making campaign contributions, that it can gain access and influence."

Rules Do Not Apply

Federal ethics [rules](#) aim to discourage officials and their [spouses](#) from accepting gifts from interests "seeking official action" from a government agency. But the rules do not apply to speaking fees, said Craig Holman an advocate for tightened ethics structures at Public Citizen, a watchdog group in Washington.

The rules at issue "wouldn't have any regulations that would make this illegal, unless of course there were a quid pro quo, and that would be a violation of the bribery laws," Holman told IBTimes. "There isn't an ethics rule that prohibits someone like Bill Clinton from charging exorbitant speaking fees and collecting those speaking fees from businesses that have interests before the administration."

But regardless of the rules, he added, the dynamic through which President Clinton has been able to profit from the same companies eager to gain the ear of his wife's department "poses a very troubling conflict-of-interest situation that is going to continue to dog Hillary over the course of the campaign."

The Clintons did not respond to IBTimes' questions about the propriety of the speaking arrangements. A spokesperson for the White House referred questions to the State Department and the Clinton Foundation, neither of which responded.

When she became secretary of state in 2009, Hillary Clinton [agreed](#) to subject Bill Clinton's speaking engagements to a conflict-of-interest review by an ethics counsel in Clinton's State Department. [Documents](#) from Judicial Watch show the counsel's office approving the bulk of the speaking engagements -- even those that came during or after periods when the firms paying Bill Clinton were filing disclosure forms notifying government regulators that they were lobbying the State Department.

The revelation that the Clinton family accepted money from 13 firms actively working to influence the Clinton-run State Department follows IBTimes' [report](#) on Monday showing that Goldman Sachs paid Bill Clinton \$200,000 just before the banking giant began lobbying the State Department. It also follows earlier IBTimes reports on money flowing into the Clinton Foundation from [Pacific Rubiales](#) and [Cisco Systems](#) just before Clinton took actions at the State Department that benefited those companies.

Ten of the 13 firms that both lobbied the State Department and paid Bill Clinton speaking fees did so within the very same three-month reporting period. This group includes five technology firms -- Oracle, Dell, Microsoft, Salesforce and VeriSign -- that collectively paid Bill Clinton a total of \$1.05 million.

Federal records show that Microsoft and Oracle were lobbying Clinton's State Department on, among other issues, immigrant work visas. Oracle was also lobbying in pursuit of legislation

dealing with penalties for aiding espionage. Dell was concerned with tariffs imposed by European countries on its computer products. VeriSign was lobbying on cybersecurity and Internet taxation. Salesforce was lobbying on cloud computing, security controls and electronic privacy issues.

Three of the technology firms that paid Bill Clinton while lobbying Hillary Clinton's agency also received lucrative State Department contracts. Microsoft received almost [\\$4 million](#) in such contracts after receiving [none](#) the year before Clinton joined President Barack Obama's Cabinet. Oracle received \$6.5 million in State Department contracts, a large increase from prior years. Dell secured contracts worth more than [\\$28 million](#), up from just [\\$2.5 million](#) in the year before Clinton became secretary of state.

A spokesman for Dell told IBTimes that the company had paid for President Clinton to address the company's customers at a conference as a means of sharing his insights on global issues.

"As a former president, he has a unique perspective on world affairs and we were eager for him to share that perspective with our customers," said the Dell spokesman, David Frink. He characterized Dell's lobbying of the State Department as basic corporate engagement.

"Dell regularly communicates with the U.S. government, and is asked its opinion by government officials, on various subjects," Frink said. "As a global company, we are happy to share our perspective on trade, technology, taxes and other issues that affect the company, our customers and our team members."

Microsoft and Oracle did not respond to questions.

'Insightful And Informative'

Bill Clinton received \$200,000 from the National Retail Federation in January 2012, during the same time period the group was lobbying the State Department. At that time, the trade association, which represents retail businesses, was opposing legislation to fight Chinese currency manipulation that could cost companies doing business there. The group said its payments to Bill Clinton had nothing to do with its work lobbying the former president's wife.

"The National Retail Federation works with agencies and speaker bureaus to find prominent national and international leaders to address our members and attendees in the hope that they will find the remarks insightful and informative," said Stephen Schatz, the group's spokesman. He said the group's events have featured similarly prominent speakers in the past.

The mining conglomerate BHP Billiton paid the former president \$175,000 to speak at a board of directors meeting in Australia in June 2012. During that time period, the firm's federal disclosures show, it was lobbying the State Department about "mining interests in Gabon."

Other speaking fees flowed to Bill Clinton just before or just after firms lobbied his wife's State Department.

The trade association representing drug companies, PhRMA, paid Bill Clinton \$200,000 to speak at its annual members meeting in April 2011 -- only weeks after federal records show it lobbied Hillary Clinton's State Department on the proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership, which [could](#) boost drug company profits by tightening patent protections for pharmaceutical products. After Bill Clinton received the cash from PhRMA (Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America), Hillary Clinton gave a [speech](#) in November 2011 promoting the TPP.

Scott Coffina, who served as an associate counsel to President George W. Bush, told IBTimes the payments to Bill Clinton by firms lobbying Hillary Clinton's agency are "worthy of an investigation."

"Did she recuse herself from any matters involving foundation donors or entities who paid President Clinton for speeches or other services? Maybe she did, and if so, she should get credit for it," said Coffina, a former federal prosecutor. "I'd also want to know the opposite -- whether she intervened in a decision-making process on behalf of a donor or benefactor."

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