

# Trump's Corruption: The Definitive List

The many ways that the president, his family and his aides are lining their own pockets.

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Opinion

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They don't even try very hard to hide it.

President Trump, his family and more than a few of his appointees are using his presidency to enrich themselves. They are spending taxpayer dollars for their own benefit. They are accepting sweetheart deals from foreigners. And they are harnessing the power of the federal government on behalf of their businesses.

There's a word for this: corruption.

Given how widespread Trumpian corruption has become, we thought it was time to make a list. It's meant to be a definitive list of self-dealing by the president, his family, his staff or his friends — since he began running for president. To qualify, an incident needs to seem highly credible, even if it remains unresolved, and needs to involve making money.

Compiling the list made us understand why some historians believe Trump's administration is the most corrupt since at least Warren Harding's, of 1920s Teapot Dome fame. Trump administration officials and people close to them are brashly using power to amass perks and cash. They are betting that they can get away with it. So far, Congress has let them.

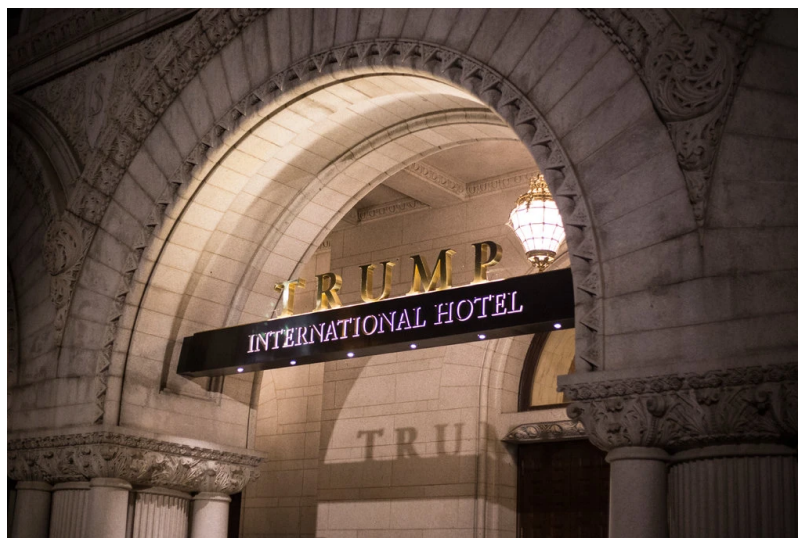
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Here's the list, sorted into thematic categories:

## Trump and Family

### Foreigners are paying the Trumps.

A few days after the 2016 election, the government of Kuwait canceled a planned event at the Four Seasons Hotel. It instead held the event — a celebration of Kuwait's National Day — at the Trump International Hotel in Washington.



International and American businesses curry favor with President Trump by spending money at his properties. Alex Wroblewski for The New York Times

That celebration fits a pattern. Officials from foreign governments have realized they can curry favor with Trump by spending money at his properties. The list of governments includes Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Bahrain, Azerbaijan, Turkey, China, India, Afghanistan and Qatar. Some may have done so even if he were not the president, but others are well aware of what they are doing.

The Constitution forbids federal officials from accepting gifts, known as emoluments, from foreign powers, unless they have received congressional approval. Congressional Democrats have sued Trump for violating this clause, and the case is now in federal court.

### **Americans are paying the Trumps.**

American officials and business leaders have also spent money at Trump properties, sometimes in an apparent effort to please the president. Gov. Paul LePage of Maine last year stayed at the Trump International Hotel in Washington. Other Republicans have held campaign fund-raisers and party events at the properties. So have corporate lobbyists.

“National Railroad Construction and Maintenance Association Dinner at the Trump Hotel where I am drinking Trump coffee,” Senator Chuck Grassley, the chairman of the Judiciary Committee, posted on Instagram last year.

### **Trump Inc. is expanding overseas.**

During Trump's presidency, his companies have pushed to expand overseas, with help from foreign governments. One example: In May, an Indonesian real-estate project that involves the Trump Organization reportedly received a \$500 million loan from a company owned by the Chinese government. Two days later, Trump tweeted that he was working to lift sanctions on a Chinese telecommunications firm with close ties to the government — over the objections of both Republicans and Democrats in Congress. He ultimately did lift the sanctions.



Donald Trump Jr., taking the stage during the Global Business Summit in New Delhi, India. Money Sharma/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images



Security officials outside a Trump Tower construction site in India. Dibyangshu Sarkar/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

Trump's businesses have also moved to expand in India, the Dominican Republic and Indonesia, using deals directly with foreign governments.

#### **Kushner Inc. is wooing foreign investment.**

Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law and a top aide, has also reportedly been using his position to help his family business — Kushner Companies, also a real-estate company. Kushner's sister, Nicole Meyer, has bragged about the company's high-level ties when trying to attract Chinese investment in a New Jersey apartment complex. The Kushners have wooed Chinese investors despite warnings from American counterintelligence officials that China is using the investments to sway Trump administration policy.



Jared Kushner has reportedly been using his position to help his family business. Doug Mills/The New York Times

The Kushner company also successfully lobbied the Qatari government to invest in 666 Fifth Avenue, a financially troubled luxury building. The company's dealings with Middle Eastern countries are especially problematic because Jared Kushner is one of the administration's top policymakers for the region and has played a central role in policy toward Qatar.

### **The presidency has become a branding opportunity.**

The president has played golf at his properties dozens of times since taking office. He refers to his Florida resort, Mar-a-Lago, as the winter White House. Shortly after his election, he celebrated New Year's along with 800 guests there, with tickets costing more than \$500. And Kellyanne Conway, a top Trump adviser, once encouraged people to buy clothes from Ivanka Trump's line — while Conway was giving a television interview from the White House.

These moves are intended, at least partly, to bring attention and ultimately customers to Trump's businesses. Of course, some of Trump's critics have responded in kind, refusing to stay at or live in a Trump-branded property since he won the election. But in other ways, the presidency has clearly helped his bottom line. One example: The Mar-a-Lago club has doubled its membership rates.

### **Taxpayers are subsidizing the Trumps.**

Trump has visited or stayed at one of his properties almost one out of every three days that he has been president, according to both The Wall Street Journal and NBC News. Like previous presidents, Trump travels with a large group of staff and security personnel, and American taxpayers typically foot at least part of the bill for the trips. Unlike previous presidents, Trump is directing money to his own business on his trips.

In one three-month period last year, the Secret Service spent about \$63,000 at Mar-a-Lago and more than \$137,000 on golf carts at Trump's Florida and New Jersey clubs.



President Trump heading to board Air Force One under the watchful eyes of his security staff. Tom Brenner for The New York Times

### **Trump Inc. gets special protection.**

The president personally intervened in a plan to relocate the F.B.I.'s Washington headquarters, apparently to protect Trump International Hotel, which is about a block away. If the F.B.I. had moved, its current site would most likely have been turned into a commercial development, and the long construction process — as well as potential for a new hotel on the site — could have hurt the Trump hotel.

Trump stopped this plan, and the White House has instead decided to build a new F.B.I. headquarters on the current site. A report by the inspector general found that officials gave misleading answers to Congress about Trump's role and the project's cost.

## **Trump's Cabinet, Aides and Allies**

### **Friendly businesses also get special treatment.**

The Education Department during the Obama administration aggressively regulated for-profit colleges — many of which have miserable records, often taking money from students without providing a useful education. Trump chose Betsy DeVos, a longtime advocate of these colleges and an investor in them, as his education secretary. She, not surprisingly, has gone easy on for-profit colleges. Among other moves, she has reassigned the members of an department team investigating potentially fraudulent activities at for-profit colleges.

DeVos is the most blatant example of administration officials protecting companies where they once worked, but there are many others. More than 164 former lobbyists work in the administration, according to the Center for Responsive Politics, including several who regulate the industries that once paid their salaries. Geoff Burr, who pushed for more lax workplace safety laws when he was the chief lobbyist for a construction group, now works at the Department of Labor. Andrew Wheeler, the head of the Environmental Protection Agency, was previously a lobbyist whose firm was paid millions of dollars by companies whose industries he now regulates.

### **Family, friends and donors get perks.**

The president and his aides have repeatedly shown they are willing to use the government's prestige and power to help their friends and relatives make money.



Scott Pruitt's numerous scandals led him to resign his position as head of the E.P.A. Eric Thayer for The New York Times



Betsy DeVos testifying before the Senate Appropriations Committee. Tom Brenner/The New York Times

#### Among the examples:

Trump suggested to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan during a meeting at Mar-a-Lago in February 2017 that Abe grant a coveted operating license to a casino company owned by Sheldon Adelson, who donated at least \$20 million to Trump's presidential campaign.

Ben Carson, the housing and urban development secretary, let his son help organize an official department event and invite people with whom the son had potential business dealings.

Scott Pruitt, the former E.P.A. head, asked his staff members to contact Republican donors with the goal of helping his wife find a job. Pruitt also rented a condo on Capitol Hill for \$50 a night, well below market value, from the wife of an energy lobbyist whose project the E.P.A. approved last March. Pruitt's many scandals led to his resignation in July.

Elaine Chao, the transportation secretary, used interviews with Chinese and Chinese-American media to raise her father's profile. He is a shipping magnate whose business transports goods between the United States and Asia, and he sat next to her during the interviews.

And although it doesn't quite rise to the same level of the other examples here: White House staffers receive a discount of up to 70 percent on Trump-branded merchandise at the president's Bedminster, N.J., golf club, reportedly at the president's recommendation.



White House staff members using Trump-branded umbrellas at his golf club in Bedminster, New Jersey. Tom Brenner for The New York Times

### **Cabinet officials make unethical stock trades.**

Several Trump officials — current and former — have traded stocks while serving in top government positions. In some cases, they appear to have made policy decisions benefiting the companies in which they owned a stake.

Tom Price, Trump's first secretary of health and human services, epitomized this form of corruption. Trump chose him despite his history of using his seat in Congress to make money. Price had a long record of putting the interests of drug companies above those of taxpayers and patients — and then investing in those drug companies on the side.

Brenda Fitzgerald, the former director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, committed a more mild version of this sin. She purchased shares in food, drug and tobacco companies after taking charge of an agency that regulates them — and that aims to reduce smoking. After her purchases became public, she resigned.

Finally, Wilbur Ross, Trump's commerce secretary, has mixed government business and his own business in multiple ways. He held on to investments — and then appears to have lied to government ethics officials about those investments. He shorted the stock of a company about which he appeared to have advance notice of bad news. He also met with the chief executive of Chevron, even though his wife owned a substantial investment — which, according to Forbes, “put himself at risk of violating a criminal conflict-of-interest law.”



Tom Price during his nomination hearing. Al Drago/The New York Times





Michael Cohen, Trump's former lawyer and fixer, after a court appearance in August. Andres Kudacki for The New York Times

### **Trump's orbit receives cash.**

Michael Cohen — Trump's former lawyer and fixer, who has since turned on him — received at least \$1 million from AT&T, Novartis and Korea Aerospace Industries shortly after the 2016 election. They were supposedly paying for his insight into the Trump administration.

Corey Lewandowski, the former manager of Trump's campaign, is paid for work that looks very much like lobbying — such as participating in a lobbying firm's phone calls with clients and doing work on behalf of T-Mobile, the telecommunications company firm. But Lewandowski has not registered as a lobbyist and says he does not need to do so.

Paul Manafort, Trump's former campaign chairman, reportedly used his position to offer private briefings to a Russian oligarch to whom he owed millions of dollars. Manafort saw the briefings as a way to “get whole.”

### **Cabinet officials take junkets.**

Trump officials have made a habit of billing American taxpayers for their personal travel. Ryan Zinke, Trump's secretary of the interior, chartered a \$12,000 flight to fly out of Las Vegas, where he had given a 12-minute speech to a hockey team owned by a businessman who donated to his congressional campaign.

David Shulkin, the secretary of veterans affairs, charged taxpayers for a trip to Europe that included stopovers at Wimbledon and Westminster Abbey, plus a river cruise for him and his wife. The resulting outcry appears to have played a role in his departure.



Ryan Zinke at a speaking event earlier this year. Ryan Hermens/Rapid City Journal, via Associated Press

Pruitt, the former head of the E.P.A., chartered flights for questionable travel, among many other things. He also pushed to fly Delta rather than the government's contract carrier, to accrue frequent flier miles. He flew first class and stayed in hotels that were more expensive than those allowed by government standards. And he let lobbyists help arrange foreign trips for him.

Brock Long, the head of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, spent \$151,000 on government vehicles without authorization, including to travel to his North Carolina home. He was ordered to repay the government.

Steven Mnuchin, the Treasury secretary, looked into whether he could use a military plane to fly him to Europe for his honeymoon. Later, he used military planes for several trips. The Treasury Department's inspector general concluded that Mnuchin broke no laws by doing so, but criticized Mnuchin's insufficient explanation for why he needed to spend \$800,000 on the trips.



Steven Mnuchin and his wife, Louise Linton, holding an uncut sheet of \$1 notes bearing Mnuchin's name. Andrew Harrer/Bloomberg

And Price, the former health secretary, spent hundreds of thousands of taxpayer dollars on private planes. His history of unethical stock trading didn't keep Trump from naming Price to the cabinet. But the private-plane scandal received enough attention that the White House eventually forced Price to resign.

### **Trump's team enjoys interior decorating.**

The pettiest kind of Trumpian corruption takes the form of interior decorating.

Zinke, the interior secretary, spent \$139,000 in taxpayer money on new doors for his office. Carson, the secretary of health and human services, picked out a dining set for his office that cost \$31,000 — and then gave Congress contradictory explanations for the purchase and blamed it on his wife. Pruitt ordered a \$43,000 soundproof phone booth installed in his office and appears to have violated federal law by failing to inform Congress about it.

## Where is Congress?

**It has shirked its constitutional duty.**

The biggest scandal of all, however, is not even the corruption of the Trump administration. It's the inaction of Congress.



President Trump's motorcade driving to dinner last month at the Trump International Hotel in Washington. Al Drago for The New York Times

The founders were well aware that the government they were creating could end up with corrupt or unethical leaders, all the way up to the president. That's why the Constitution gives Congress tremendous power to investigate and even remove officials in the executive branch. Yet the current congressional leaders — the Republican leaders — have refused to do so. They have shirked their duty to act as a check on the president and his appointees. They have instead defended Trump and made excuses on his behalf. They have enabled the most corrupt administration of our lifetimes.

*What's missing from this list? If you think there are other examples that should appear on this list, email us at [leonhardt@nytimes.com](mailto:leonhardt@nytimes.com).*

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