

Bush Versus Obama: Who's Worse?

By [Washington's Blog](#)

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Obama Names Top Fundraisers to Major Political Posts

Glenn Greenwald [notes](#) today:

Last week, the Obama administration announced its choice to lead the Federal Communications Commission: Tom Wheeler, who is not only a former telecom lobbyist but also a huge bundler for the Obama campaign. The New York Times Editorial Page [today explains](#) that this choice is “raising serious questions about [Obama’s] 2007 pledge that corporate lobbyists would not finance his campaign or run his administration.” It also notes that “given his background, it is almost certain that [Wheeler] raised money [for Obama] from people whose companies he would regulate, creating potential conflicts of interest.”

Last week, President Obama named another big bundler of his, the billionaire heiress Penny Pritzker, to be his Commerce Secretary; at the Nation, [Rick Perlstein details](#) just some of the interesting questions about that choice that need to be explored. At this point, the only surprising thing is that [there are any more bundlers left](#) for Obama to appoint to important administration positions.

While despicable, this is nothing new.

The Center for Public Integrity [reported](#) in 2011 that Obama had rewarded as many big money bundlers in **2** years as Bush had appointed in **8**:



Source: Public Citizen, iWatchNews analysis. Graphic: [Jeremy Borden](#)/iWatch News.

The Center [wrote](#):

As a candidate, Obama spoke passionately about diminishing the clout of moneyed interests and making the White House more accessible to everyday Americans. In kicking off his presidential run on Feb. 10, 2007, he blasted “the cynics, the lobbyists, the special interests,” who he said had “turned our government into a game only they can afford to play.”

[But:]

- Overall, 184 of 556, or about one-third, of Obama bundlers or their spouses joined the administration in some role. But the percentages are much higher for the big-dollar bundlers. **Nearly 80 percent of those who collected more than \$500,000 for Obama took “key administration posts,”** as defined by the White House. More than half the ambassador nominees who were bundlers raised more than half a million.

- **The big bundlers had broad access to the White House for meetings with top administration officials** and glitzy social events. In all, campaign bundlers and their family members account for more than 3,000 White House meetings and visits. Half of them raised \$200,000 or more.

- Some Obama bundlers have ties to companies that stand to gain financially from the president’s policy agenda, particularly in clean energy and telecommunications, and some already have done so. Level 3 Communications, for instance, snared \$13.8 million in stimulus money. At least 18 other bundlers have ties to businesses poised to profit from government spending to promote clean energy, telecommunications and other key administration priorities.

Bundling is controversial because it permits campaigns to skirt individual contribution limits of \$2,500 in federal elections. Bundlers pool donations from fundraising networks and as a result “play an enormous role in determining the success of political campaigns,” according to Public Citizen. The group has tracked bundlers on a website www.whitehouseforsale.org in the belief that they are “apt to receive preferential treatment if their candidate wins.”

Ambassadorships have been the classic payoff for big bundlers. But it’s not just the posts in foreign capitals that are attractive. Light, the NYU expert on presidential transitions, said that in recent years many have sought jobs with deep reach into the federal bureaucracy — and found a receptive ear in the White House.

“When they get a resume from a bundler, that is a real signal of seriousness,” Light said. “It’s also a thinly veiled quid pro quo,” and it “goes without saying they will get considered.”

Bringing in a lot of cash to the campaign, Light added, “seems to be well established as a signaling device for getting into key jobs running the government. It’s become more significant and nobody seems to have much outrage about it.”

Passing over career diplomats in favor of mega-donors amounts to “selling ambassadorships,” said [Susan Johnson](#), president of the American Foreign Service Association. She said it runs contrary to the law and is unethical, yet, “That hasn’t stopped anybody.”

[Thomas Pickering](#), who served as ambassador to Russia and several other countries during a diplomatic career spanning four decades, said turning to bundlers adds a “new dimension” to what he termed “buying offices” through aggressive fundraising.

Hyatt hotels heiress Penny Pritzker, Wall Street titan Robert Wolf and financier Mark Gallogly, for instance, all served on the President's Economic Recovery Advisory Commission.

In late February, in creating a [new commission](#) to take on the task of creating jobs, Obama again appointed the three businesspeople. Transcripts of the recovery board meetings show that commission members are free to press for an agenda that could significantly benefit their business interests.

The Center [pointed out](#) in 2012:

- At least 68 of 350 Obama bundlers for the 2012 election or their spouses have served in the administration, ranging from seats on advisory boards that tackle critical national issues such as economic growth, to ceremonial posts such as serving on the board of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.
- At least 250 of the bundlers have been cleared to attend a White House event since January 2009. Most have come twice while others are frequent visitors. The events range from policy briefings to coveted invitations to state dinners and music and entertainment nights featuring top-draw performers at the executive mansion.
- At least 30 of the 2012 bundlers have ties to companies that conduct business with federal agencies or hope to do so. They range from Wall Street investors to green energy, technology and defense firms with multimillion-dollar government contracts.

Bundlers have been cleared for more than 5,000 visits to the White House from January 2009 through August 2011, according to visitor logs.

Boyle of Common Cause said that wealthy bundlers can amass political clout and use it to "further enrich themselves, and their circle of friends and business acquaintances."

"Money buys access and influence and that's the big problem," she said. "Those who don't have it are left out in the cold. That's not how our democracy is supposed to work, and it must change."

That's not likely, according to Tufts political science professor Berry.

Asked if a Republican presidential challenger would end the practice should he win the office next year, Berry said: "It would be shocking if they decided not to try to reward their most loyal fundraisers. It would make no sense."

Of course, Obama's top donors in the 2008 election [included](#):

- Goldman Sachs

- JP Morgan Chase
- Citigroup
- General Electric
- Morgan Stanley

Goldman Sachs folks held so many top jobs in the Obama administration in his first term that everyone called the cozy relationship "[Government Sachs](#)".

Obama appointed GE chairman Jeffrey Immelt as his [jobs czar](#).

And of course, Obama rewarded his big contributors with [tidal waves of government money](#).

Bush was a horrible crony nepotist, who favored the super-elite at the expense of the little guy.

[Obama's worse](#).

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