

Democratic Convention Hosted by Republican Donors, Anti-Obamacare Lobbyists

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THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY'S [2012 platform](#) pledged to “curb the influence of lobbyists and special interests.” But the 2016 convention in Philadelphia will be officially hosted by lobbyists and corporate executives, a number of whom are actively working to undermine progressive policies achieved by President Barack Obama, including health care reform and net neutrality.

Some of the members of the 2016 Democratic National Convention [Host Committee](#), whose [job is](#) to organize the logistics and events for the convention, are hardly even Democratic Party stalwarts, given that many have donated and raised thousands of dollars for Republican presidential and congressional candidates this cycle.

The composition of the 15-member Host Committee may appear out of sync with the rhetoric of Democratic presidential candidates Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton, but the reality is that the party, in the form of the Democratic National Committee, has moved decisively to embrace the lobbying industry. In October 2015, DNC chair Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz, D-Fla., [reportedly](#) huddled with dozens of lobbyists to plan the convention in Philadelphia, and provided the influence peddlers involved with a menu of offerings in exchange for donations. In February, news reports [revealed](#) that the DNC had quietly lifted the Obama-era ban on federal lobbyist donations to the party and convention committee.

Anna Adams-Sarthou, the communications director for the Philadelphia 2016 Host Committee, wrote in an email to *The Intercept* that she has “no concerns” about lobbyists participating in the effort, because “the Host Committee is a nonprofit entity that does not lobby.”

The Host Committee, however, is deeply [involved](#) in planning events for the delegates, fundraising, and handling media relations, among other responsibilities.

“Our Host Committee is made up a diverse group of civic leaders that have led efforts like this in the past, many of whom were integrally involved in the bid for Philadelphia to host the convention,” Adams-Sarthou wrote.

The Host Committee’s finance chair is Daniel Hilferty. In his [day job](#), Hilferty is CEO of Independence Blue Cross, a health insurance giant that covers nine million people. In December, Hilferty became [board chairman](#) of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association of America, a trade group that lobbies for the insurance industry, and he [serves on the board of directors](#) of America’s Health Insurance Plan’s (AHIP), the insurance industry lobbying group that [spearheaded the campaign](#) against the Affordable Care Act. Lobby registration

documents show the BCBS Association is actively [supporting](#) a number of Republican bills to roll back provisions of the ACA.

In an [interview](#) conducted late last year, Hilferty said he plans to make “sure to work closely at the congressional level, with the administration, with the Department of Health and Human Services and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, to have input” into how the ACA is implemented under the next administration.

Hilferty has also donated heavily to Republicans this cycle, giving \$10,000 to Prosperity for Pennsylvania, a Super PAC supporting the reelection of Sen. Pat Toomey, R-Pa.; \$1,000 to the PAC supporting Sen. Orin Hatch, R-Utah; \$1,000 to Sen. Tim Scott, R-S.C.; \$2,700 to Chris Christie’s presidential campaign; \$25,300 to the NRCC, a GOP committee designed to re-elect House Republicans; and \$2,700 to Jeb Bush. Hilferty also gave \$2,700 to Hillary Clinton’s campaign.

Allyson Schwartz, a former Democratic lawmaker, is a co-chair of the Host Committee. She was recently named head of a new advocacy group for the health insurance industry called Better Medicare Alliance. The group, [according](#) to the Center for Public Integrity, was set up by APCO, a lobbying firm for health insurance companies, to push to expand Medicare Advantage plans, the privately managed programs that were curtailed with the enactment of the ACA.

David Cohen is the special advisor to the Host Committee, and serves as the executive vice president of Comcast, overseeing the company’s lobbying and regulatory strategy. In addition to being a “Hillblazer” — one of Hillary Clinton’s bundlers who has [raised \\$100,000 or more](#) — Cohen has been a particularly [bitter](#) and [duplicitous leading opponent](#) of the rules regarding net neutrality, the principle that all Internet traffic must be treated equally. And despite hosting fundraisers for Clinton at his home [last summer](#), Cohen has spent heavily to help elect a Republican Congress, including recent donations to the NRCC; Sen. Toomey; Sen. Scott; Sen. Kelly Ayotte, R-N.H.; as well as \$33,400 to the NRSC, a committee for helping elect GOP members to the Senate.

The Philadelphia Host Committee chair, former Gov. Ed Rendell, headed for [Wall Street](#) as soon as he left office, and has since represented a number of controversial special interests. In 2011, as New York was debating regulations on fracking, Rendell wrote a pro-fracking [opinion column](#) in the *New York Daily News*, while [failing to disclose](#) that he was a paid consultant at a private equity firm that had investments in the industry.

That same year, Rendell started providing [paid speeches](#) on behalf of the Mujahideen-e Khalq (MEK), a fringe Iranian exile group that was considered a terrorist organization by the State Department at the time (it was delisted [in 2012](#)).

The former governor also joined the group Fix The Debt — an organization [backed by private equity billionaire Pete Peterson](#) that [advocates for cutting Social Security benefits](#) — [co-chairing its activities](#) alongside Judd Gregg.

Rendell is currently a [special counsel](#) at the law and lobbying firm Ballard Spahr; earlier this year, the firm launched a [new election law group](#), advising clients on campaign finance and lobbying strategy.

“The Democratic Party, especially the DNC, have never liked Obama’s policies to disengage

lobbyists from campaign fundraising,” says Craig Holman, an expert on ethics and campaign finance with Public Citizen. “The party only went along with the restrictions because Obama was the party leader. As soon as Obama could no longer be viewed as the leader of the party, the DNC quietly repealed the lobbyist restrictions. The public learned about it only weeks later.”

“Party bosses have always preferred a Wild West when it comes to fundraising,” he adds. “If party bosses had their way, we would have no restrictions on campaign contributions to the parties and return to the days of Tammany Hall.”

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