

Pro-Clinton Super PAC Creators Have Dubious Pasts

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Simon Sioni, a 29-year-old developmentally disabled man from Encino, Calif., dreamed of working for a restaurant, even taking cooking classes.

He never envisioned that his ill-fated quest for employment would help shine light on the hidden side of a new Hillary Clinton-themed super PAC.

When Sioni, then 27, saw an online advertisement from John A. Gibson Jr. seeking a partner for a nascent food truck business, he jumped at the opportunity. The two men met. Gibson explained he'd be the boss but would split the earnings.

Sioni ultimately handed Gibson a \$10,000 check to seal the deal.

The same day Sioni gave Gibson the check, he told his mother, who is also his legal guardian. Janet Sioni says she set up a meeting with Gibson at a local Starbucks to explain that the partnership wouldn't work because of her son's disabilities. Gibson promised to refund the Sionis' money — but the cash never came.

So the Sionis went to the California Superior Court in April 2012 and demanded redress. A judge agreed. But Gibson hasn't returned a cent, and Janet Sioni continues to lament the man whom she considers a "con artist" who took advantage on her son.

"This guy took his \$10,000 from him and vanished," Mike Pirouzian, the private investigator who the court assigned to enforce its judgment against Gibson, told the [Center for Public Integrity](#).

Vanished, that is, until late August.

That's when Gibson resurfaced as a player behind a super PAC called Time for Hillary.



Some of the products available for sale on [timeforhillary.com](#)

Tapping political passions

California-based [Time for Hillary](#) has grand plans for the money it collects selling \$30 T-shirts and \$10 bumper stickers: It wants to register one million new voters at colleges across the country in support of a 2016 presidential run that the former first lady, U.S. senator and secretary of state may or may not make.

On the Time for Hillary website, its chairman, J.R. Worthington, [warns](#) how Republicans are already raising significant money to battle against Clinton: “It is my hope that Time for Hillary will be able to raise comparable funds to address these Republican smear campaigns.”

The website, which today is little more than an online store, further [assures visitors](#) that “each dollar you donate or spend on this site will help us make a difference.”

Linking super PACs to popular political brands like Clinton’s presents a potentially lucrative business opportunity as there is little in federal law that dictates how the unlimited amounts of money that such committees may raise must be spent. Super PAC operators can easily collect money from activists in the name of a well-known politico and pocket what they amass, so long as the expenditures are disclosed.

This makes them an attractive option not just for political professionals and grassroots activists — the unrelated Ready for Hillary super PAC has [already raised](#) more than \$1.25 million — but also grifters.

This much is known about the Time for Hillary super PAC: It’s connected to political neophytes with histories of financial problems and involvement with a number of obscure or failed business ventures, including food trucks, car rental companies and an illustrated e-book inspired by the “Power Rangers.”

What’s not clear is whether Worthington, the purported Time for Hillary chairman, is a real person.

The “celebrities, athletes, directors, business men and women” [touted as supporting the group](#) are also unknown. While Time for Hillary hasn’t announced the names of any celebrity endorsers, it has appealed for aid to the likes of Twitter co-founder [Biz Stone](#), professional basketball legend [Magic Johnson](#), Democratic U.S. Senate candidate [Cory Booker](#) and actress [Eva Longoria](#) from its own Twitter account.

Will this group deliver on its promises?

“It’s fair to wonder, ‘Is this thing for real?’” said Kyle Kondik, an analyst at the University of Virginia’s [Center for Politics](#). “It’s hard to know what actual political activity they are going to do.”

Hucksters for Hillary?

Three names emerge as the forces behind Time for Hillary — at least on paper.

The first person in this tangled web of characters is John Gibson, the man the California Superior Court says owes the Sionis money.

Gibson is the man who registered the Time for Hillary super PAC’s domain name, TimeforHillary.com.

In his late twenties, Gibson originally hails from Louisiana, according to voter registration records that also indicate he’s a Democrat. On his Facebook and Twitter profiles, Gibson describes himself as a “billionaire in training” and an “entrepreneur/mogul building brands in La [sic].”

In 2010, Gibson published a financial self-help book entitled “Wealthy Secrets: Secrets Every Individual Must Know.” It admonishes readers not to “search for get rich quick schemes or magic investments” but to embrace principles that will lead to success and help them maintain a “millionaire mentality.”

Gibson’s own financial success is dubious.

California business records show Gibson is the registered agent for Crescent City Cheesecakes LLC, a bakery that received roundly negative [reviews on Yelp.com](#) during its roughly 18-month existence. Despite this feedback, an archived version of Crescent City Cheesecakes’ website indicates that Gibson sought to establish franchises of the operation for a \$15,000 fee.

In court records, Gibson has further been described as the “marketing director” of Zinergy Inc. That company, listed at a UPS store in Santa Monica, Calif., once touted producing a “superfruit packed juice blend” containing extracts from seven fruits including acai, goji and pomegranate. It is no longer in operation today.

Gibson has also registered the domains of several other business ventures in recent years, including [MonthlyMotors.com](#), [LAExclusiveMotors.com](#), [TheEarO.com](#), [SliderCityRestaurants.com](#) and [TheBobaLady.com](#), according to Internet registry records.

Notably, the two automotive companies list the same telephone number as the one Time for Hillary briefly listed on its own website.

The phone number was deleted after the Center for Public Integrity raised questions about the connection between the businesses and the super PAC. The online domain name registration was also changed from Gibson’s name to simply “T4H T4H.”

Additionally, Gibson removed a reference to being the “CEO and founder” of [MonthlyMotors.com](#) from his Twitter profile after the Center for Public Integrity sent questions to the Time for Hillary super PAC.

Meanwhile, Gibson’s wife — Leigh Angelle Gibson — is listed as the treasurer of Time for Hillary on the paperwork it filed with the FEC.

She has, however, shown little aptitude for managing money.

Last year, court records indicate she went through a Chapter 7 personal bankruptcy, after her and her husband’s California apartment burned down. At the time, she was unemployed and had racked up about \$450,000 in debt, court documents show. That included roughly \$57,000 in student loans and an auto loan for a 2006 Mercedes SLK280, which was ultimately repossessed, according to the records.

Federal Election Commission records further show that Leigh Gibson is also the treasurer of a separate super PAC called “USA Moving Forward,” which [launched in February](#). John Gibson also registered that group’s domain name, [USAMovingForward.com](#).

Just as Time for Hillary launched in August, the FEC issued Leigh Gibson [a warning](#) for failing to file a mandatory mid-year campaign finance report for USA Moving Forward. The sternly worded letter stressed that this oversight could result in “civil money penalties, an audit or legal enforcement action.”

Leigh Gibson [filed a report](#) in early September showing the super PAC had not raised or spent a penny, shortly after the Center for Public Integrity began inquiring about the missing disclosures.

Then there's J.R. Worthington.

Mystery man

Time for Hillary lists Worthington as its chairman, and a man identifying himself as Worthington responded by email to initial questions from the Center for Public Integrity.

But Worthington's biography is sketchy, at best, with several factors indicating Worthington may be an alias or nom de plume for Gibson.

Earlier this year, Worthington [published](#) a "Power Rangers"-inspired e-book called "Worthington Knights" about five crime-fighting teenagers.

The "Worthington Knights" franchise wasn't designed to stop after one book, which it did. Rather, it was envisioned as a seven-part series that would also have its own video game.

An [unsuccessful fundraising campaign](#) on the website Kickstarter.com attempted to raise \$10,000 for the "first ebook-to-video game project on Kickstarter." A professional public relations firm was even hired to promote "Worthington Knights," but Worthington or his associates never paid the company.

"We left on very bad terms," said Ria Romano of Florida-based RPR Public Relations, adding that Worthington "didn't pay his bill."

"He remains a mystery to us," she added.

Curiously, when the "Worthington Knights" project was first unveiled on KickStarter, a bespectacled, twentysomething white man from Los Angeles identified as "[Austin](#)" was shown as its author.

Two years earlier, "Austin" had previously launched an unfruitful Kickstarter campaign trying to wrangle \$10,000 for wristwatches emblazoned with wearers' initials. His biography was nearly identical to how Worthington was later described in a "Worthington Knights" [press release](#).

Worthington appears to be a twentysomething black man in a photo on his Twitter profile. Photos posted online of Gibson bear a strong resemblance to those of Worthington.

After spending months promoting "Worthington Knights," Worthington's Twitter account is currently directing people to Amazon.com to purchase "Wealthy Secrets," the same title as Gibson's self-help book, which Worthington describes as "my book."

Moreover, records show that both John Gibson and Leigh Gibson were intimately involved in "Worthington Knights."

When the project turned to Kickstarter to attempt to raise funds for the corresponding video game, the YouTube video touting the effort was [uploaded by](#) Leigh Gibson.

Internet registry records show that John Gibson registered multiple domain names

associated with “Worthington Knights” — including WorthingtonKnights.com and JRWorthington.com.

Meanwhile, John Gibson’s Twitter profile also raises questions about whether he and Worthington are one in the same: The picture displayed matches one from “Wealthy Secrets” that is also on Gibson’s Facebook page and the chosen handle is MrJAGjr — the initials of John A. Gibson Jr. Yet the chosen display name is MrJRW, the initials of J.R. Worthington.

Winning supporters one T-shirt sale at a time

Offline, Time for Hillary doesn’t have much of a physical footprint. The start-up super PAC lists a mailbox at Studio City Mailboxes and More, outside of Hollywood, Calif., as its own mailing address.

The first email query from the Center for Public Integrity to the generic email address listed on the Time for Hillary website received a response from “Jaime,” who declined to provide a full name and said the message had been forwarded to Worthington.

A person identifying himself as Worthington initially answered several questions about the super PAC, but later stopped responding to phone and email messages. He did not respond to the question of whether he and Gibson were one in the same.

He did say that the super PAC would “take the high road and simply not focus on any negativity that may come to our organization” and that it would keep striving “to ensure Hillary Clinton has the majority youth vote.”

“Because our focus is on the youth vote we view Time For Hillary Apparel as a great way to reach our target audience,” he added. “Hillary Clinton has millions of very passionate supporters who would love to show their support through apparel.”

According to Worthington, “All our team members are volunteers. No one is on salary or employed.”

Representatives for Clinton did not respond to numerous interview requests.

Likewise, neither of the Gibsons responded to repeated requests for comment.

But from its Twitter account, Time for Hillary also [issued](#) an apology Monday, stating, “Each week we receive 100s of requests from bloggers, reporters and the like we do apologize if we cant get to you all.”

‘Every day I cry for this money’

Another [recent tweet](#) from the Time for Hillary super PAC promised that “big news” is coming soon.

Will the news be a celebrity endorsement? An update about voter registration efforts? An announcement lauding new clothing designs and products?

Two people who won’t be purchasing pro-Clinton apparel from the Time for Hillary super PAC are Simon and Janet Sioni, who are still waiting for Gibson to pay them back.

“Every day I cry for this money,” explained Janet Sioni, who worries that other people may fall victim to Gibson.

People like Gibson, Sioni said, “take advantage” of “innocent people.”

Chris Zubak-Skees contributed to this report.

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