



Written by [Brian Koenig](#) on January 16, 2012

Kerry Kennedy May Make \$40M in Chevron's Ecuador Oil-Drilling Dispute

Kennedy has virulently opposed oil production in "environmentally-sensitive" areas, as she has lobbied officials and penned a series of opinion pieces to signify her outrage over the environmental damage that Chevron has purportedly committed near the town of Lago Agrio, where 1,700 square miles of rain forest has allegedly been decimated. Kennedy expressed her discontent in a [November 2009 article](#) for the *Huffington Post*:



Traces of paradise are still visible. From the air, the rainforest region in northern Ecuador — known as the Oriente — appears as silvery mist and swaths of verdant green.

But beneath the cloud cover and canopy, the jungle is a tangle of oil slicks, festering sludge, and rusted pipeline. Smokestacks sprout from the ground, spewing throat-burning fumes into the air. Wastewater from unlined pits seeps into the groundwater and flows into the rivers and streams.

"This nightmarish landscape is the legacy of Texaco," Kennedy added, highlighting her 2009 journey to the northern part of the country. The lawsuit, which was filed by a group of Ecuadorian Indians and farmers, claims that native citizens have suffered illnesses and ecological damage to their land due to severe oil contamination. The allegation is that Texaco, which was acquired by Chevron in 2001, dumped more than [18 billion gallons](#) of toxic oil production waste into streams and rivers, rather than injecting it underground. Further, Kennedy noted:

In the process, Texaco constructed over 900 oil sludge pits, many the size of Olympic swimming pools. Unlike swimming pools, these pits were unlined punctures in the earth. With no concrete to protect the surrounding soil, poison seeped into the ground water.

I had heard about what has been called "Chevron's Chernobyl in the Amazon" for years. But nothing could prepare me for the horror I witnessed this week in Ecuador.

I held a dragonfly covered in oil in my hands, desperately and hopelessly trying to flutter its wings. I saw pig footprints in the mud next to the oily gunk, where it had eaten contaminated grass, and will soon be contaminating the children, women, and men, who in turn feed on Chevron's waste.

However, it appears Kennedy's "humanitarian interest" in the outcome of the trial has generated a hefty financial reward. Just a few months after writing her *Huffington Post* article, she was paid a handsome \$50,000 by the lead attorney, Steven Donziger, in the case against Chevron.

In an internal e-mail [obtained](#) by the *New York Post*, lawyers and consultants of the legal team battling



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Chevron signified their enthusiasm over Kennedy's excursion to the affected site: "Kerry Kennedy, daughter of RFK and human rights lawyer, is coming to Ecuador.... This could give us a real boost.... Will cost money, but not much."

The *Post* reports that Kennedy was secretly hired as a "public-relations consultant" by Donziger, as she cashed "in on her respected family name and legacy." Beyond the initial \$50,000 fee (paid on February 22, 2010), she was granted a 0.25-percent stake in the \$18-billion judgment, which, if the case is upheld will provide her an astonishing \$40 million. According to a draft budget released September 2010 and invoices from Donziger, Kennedy collected another \$40,000 in expenses in June 2010, and was prepared to secure an additional \$10,000 per month.

Adding to the pronounced benefit of the Kennedy name is the legal team's use of Kennedy's intimate ties with New York politics to bolster their legal battle against Chevron. Not only was Kennedy's father a former New York Senator, but her 13-year marriage with current Governor Cuomo has granted her a front-row seat to the state's internal political affairs.

In an e-mail to Donziger dated March 30, 2010, a colleague expounded on how the legal team could use Kennedy as a key political asset to persuade state Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli to publicly dispute Chevron's actions in the Ecuadorian controversy. In turn, DiNapoli demanded that Chevron settle the suit. Other e-mails revealed that Kennedy may try to persuade DiNapoli to expunge the state's \$780-million investment in the oil company.

Some legal experts contend that Kennedy's negligence in disclosing her financial earnings for her advocacy could spur an ethical dilemma. "If the lawyers are actively involved in counseling her in what to say and haven't urged her to come clean, that would violate the rule against deception," asserted Columbia University law professor William Simon. Moreover, a Chevron spokesman alleged, "This is exactly the type of documented misconduct" the plaintiffs have indulged in before.



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