



Written by [Brian Koenig](#) on March 26, 2012

Pro-Obama Super PAC Donors Granted Access to White House

President Obama benefits from a fundraising advantage that Republican presidential hopefuls can't quite match: Access to the White House. According to an investigation by The Associated Press, over 60 of the President's top campaign donors have attended the White House more than once for state dinners, holiday events, and meetings with top administration advisers.



While there is no legal violation for inviting campaign donors to the White House, Obama's past criticisms of Washington's insider privileges may proffer a generous dose of hypocrisy. In fact, Obama railed against the Supreme Court's 2010 *Citizens United* decision that prohibited the government from regulating political expenditures by unions and corporations — which, in turn, led to the development of the super PAC, a political action committee that is allowed to spend unlimited amounts of money to support political campaigns.

On January 21, 2010, the day of the Supreme Court's *Citizen's United* ruling, the President [declared](#):

With its ruling today, the Supreme Court has given a green light to a new stampede of special interest money in our politics. It is a major victory for big oil, Wall Street banks, health insurance companies and the other powerful interests that marshal their power every day in Washington to drown out the voices of everyday Americans. This ruling gives the special interests and their lobbyists even more power in Washington — while undermining the influence of average Americans who make small contributions to support their preferred candidates. That's why I am instructing my Administration to get to work immediately with Congress on this issue. We are going to talk with bipartisan Congressional leaders to develop a forceful response to this decision. The public interest requires nothing less.

During the 2008 primary, Obama assailed Democratic rival Hillary Rodham Clinton for inviting David Geffen (during her husband's presidential tenure) — who the Obama campaign claimed had raised \$18 million for the Clintons — to spend the night in the Lincoln bedroom.

The AP tapped [White House visitor access records](#) and identified 470 prominent financial backers and concluded that at least 250 of Obama's major donors and fundraisers sojourned on the White House at least once. Some Obama "bundlers" — major fundraisers who bundle together campaign contributions from multiple parties — visited the White House for one-on-one meetings with top staffers, including



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senior adviser Valerie Jarrett and former chief of staff Pete Rouse.

Despite his purported vexation with Washington lobbying and big corporate donors, Obama [publicly endorsed](#) in February the pro-Obama super PAC called Priorities USA Action. The Obama campaign's decision to promote Priorities USA arrived soon after new fundraising reports indicated that two Republican super PACs raised a sizable \$51 million last year.

Among Priorities USA's top donors are Hollywood director Steven Spielberg and Chicago investment manager John W. Rogers Jr., who contributed more than \$150,000 combined to the committee. But not only is Rogers a friend and prominent campaign donor to the President, he was appointed by the administration in October 2010 to run a financial advisory council. Rogers has visited the White House over two dozen times, including appointments where he met with Jarrett and former chief of staff Bill Daley.

Other bigwig donors who have visited the White House since Obama took office include:

- Lenny Mendonca, a director of consulting firm McKinsey & Co., gave \$50,000 to Priorities USA Action in November 2011, according to records submitted to the Federal Election Commission. Visitor logs showed Mendonca met in June 2011 with Carl Shapiro, one of Obama's top economic advisors, and three months earlier with Melody Barnes, the president's chief domestic policy advisor.
- Orin Kramer, a key Obama fundraiser who gave \$15,000 to Priorities USA in October, attended White House events with Obama at least five times, according to visitor logs, plus his invitation to a state dinner March 14 honoring British Prime Minister David Cameron. His other visits included a smaller gathering in March 2011 that was described as a presidential meeting but records offered few details.
- Spielberg, another Obama supporter, donated \$100,000 last July to Priorities USA — one of the group's largest individual contributions. One month later, Spielberg attended a Rose Garden event with the president. He also has visited the White House at least three other times, including in March 2010 to screen a movie for the president and first lady Michelle Obama.

While the AP's review does not indicate any legal wrongdoing, its contents go directly against what the President allegedly represents. Moreover, Obama's pledge to rid his administration of self-indulgent lobbyists has fallen well short, as he has courted major players in the lobbying industry who are now raising millions of dollars for his reelection campaign. For example, the *New York Times* [reported](#) last October, at least 15 of Obama's bundlers hold influential posts in the lobbying industry (though they are not registered), and have raised more than five million dollars for the President. As *The New American* [reported](#) last October:

These 15 bundlers are a dominant force among Washington's business and political alliances. Sally Susman, an executive who manages lobbying operations for the pharmaceutical company Pfizer, raised more than \$500,000 for the Obama campaign and helped promote a \$35,800-a-ticket dinner for the President. However, under the labyrinthine tenets of federal lobbying, Susman has avoided registering with the Senate as a lobbyist.

Four of those bundlers were registered lobbyists at one time, and several others currently work for large lobbying and law firms. Further, a [study](#) by the Center for Public Integrity found that 80 percent of Obama's bundlers who raised at least \$500,000 for his 2008 campaign ended up securing "key administration posts."



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Regarding the AP report, Kramer asserted that the information cited was “completely inaccurate,” but he did not refute allegations that he visited the White House. He acknowledged in an email, “I help candidates because I think election outcomes matter.”

Photo: Film director Steven Spielberg arrives for a State Dinner hosted by President Barack Obama for Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh at the White House, Nov. 24, 2009: AP Images



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