



Written by [Veronika Kyrylenko](#) on February 4, 2026

Report: UAE Royal's Investment in Trump Crypto Firm Preceded Major U.S. AI Chip Access

Just days before U.S. President Donald Trump's 2025 inauguration, a secret foreign investment quietly reshaped the ownership of his family's new cryptocurrency venture. The buyer was tied to one of the most powerful figures in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Within months, that same figure's country secured sweeping access to advanced American artificial intelligence chips.

The arrangement, detailed in a [Wall Street Journal](#) (WSJ) investigation published Saturday, is fueling renewed accusations that Trump is monetizing the presidency. [The New Yorker](#) recently estimated the Trump family's wealth ballooned by about \$4 billion in 2025. That number excludes profits from the family's preexisting businesses. Ethics watchdogs quoted by the outlet argue that "no other President has ever so nakedly exploited his position, or on such a scale." Trump, on his part, recently explained to [The New York Times](#) why he no longer prohibits his family to engage in global business dealings, as he did during his first term:

I found out that nobody cared, and I'm allowed to.

A Half-billion-dollar Stake

According to company documents and people familiar with the matter:

Four days before Donald Trump's inauguration last year, lieutenants to an Abu Dhabi royal secretly signed a deal with the Trump family to purchase a 49% stake in their fledgling cryptocurrency venture for half a billion dollars.

The deal involved [World Liberty Financial](#) (WLFI), the president's own crypto venture, co-founded with three of his sons, real-estate developers Steve and Zach Witkoff, and several other investors. Per the *WSJ*, the previously unreported deal was signed by Eric Trump, one the president's sons. Under the agreement,



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the buyers would pay half up front, steering \$187 million to Trump family entities.

At the same time,

at least \$31 million was ... slated to flow to entities affiliated with the family of Steve Witkoff ... who weeks earlier had been named U.S. envoy to the Middle East.

Another \$31 million went to an entity tied to co-founders Zak Folkman and Chase Herro.

Sheikh Tahnoon bin Zayed Al Nahyan backed the investment. The *Journal* describes him:

Tahnoon — [sometimes referred to as the “spy sheikh”](#) — is brother to the United Arab Emirates’ president, the government’s national security adviser, as well as the leader of the oil-rich country’s largest wealth fund. He oversees a more than \$1.3 trillion empire funded by his personal fortune and state money that spans from fish farms to AI to surveillance, making him one of the most powerful single investors in the world.

The paper underscores the political novelty:

The deal marked something unprecedented in American politics: a foreign government official taking a major ownership stake in an incoming U.S. president’s company.

AI Chips and a Reopened Door

At the center of the controversy is not just a business deal, but access to technology Washington treats as strategically sensitive. The previous administration was unwilling to share it with the UAE:

Under [previous President Joe Biden’s] administration, Tahnoon’s efforts to get AI hardware had been largely stymied over [fears that the sensitive technology could be diverted to China](#). Of particular concern was one of Tahnoon’s own companies, the AI firm G42, which had stoked alarm among intelligence officials and lawmakers over its close ties to the sanctioned tech giant Huawei and other Chinese firms.

Even after [G42](#) said it cut ties to China, U.S. officials remained wary.

“Trump’s election reopened the door for him,” the *Journal* writes. After the election, Tahnoon met multiple times with Trump, Steve Witkoff, and other U.S. officials. During a March White House visit, “the sheikh told officials he was eager to work with the U.S. on AI and other issues.”

Two months later, the administration committed to giving the UAE access to “around 500,000 of the most advanced AI chips a year.” At that scale, the chips are “enough to build one of the world’s biggest AI data center clusters.”

G42 [celebrated the shift](#), saying it accelerates projects including “Stargate UAE, the 1-gigawatt AI compute cluster being built by G42 for OpenAI in partnership with Oracle, Cisco, NVIDIA, and SoftBank Group, which is part of the larger [UAE-U.S. AI Campus](#).” America’s own Stargate — a sprawling, \$500-billion AI infrastructure project — was [launched by Trump](#) in collaboration with the same companies early in his second term.



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“What wasn’t publicly known,” the paper adds, was that “Tahnoon’s emissaries had signed the deal to purchase 49% of World Liberty that January.”

Shared Crypto Ties

The corporate relationships intertwined further:

Weeks before the U.S.-U.A.E. chip deal was announced in May, World Liberty CEO Zach Witkoff announced that MGX, a Tahnoon-led investment firm, would use [World Liberty’s stablecoin to complete a \\$2 billion investment](#) into the cryptocurrency exchange Binance.

Notably, this past October, Trump pardoned Binance co-founder Changpeng Zhao, who in 2023 [pleaded guilty](#) to violating anti-money-laundering and sanctions laws.

The *Journal* highlights a key omission in Witkoff’s announcement:

He didn’t disclose that MGX and World Liberty were being led by some of the same people.

The report says that “the G42 executives added to World Liberty’s board were also on the board of MGX, which is co-owned by G42.”

WLFIs spokesman David Wachsman defended the investment, calling the idea that the company should face special scrutiny “ridiculous and un-American.” He also said President Trump and Steve Witkoff “had no involvement in the deal,” and that it didn’t grant “any sort of access to government decision-making or influence over policy.”

White House Pushback

The White House has brushed aside conflict concerns. “President Trump only acts in the best interests of the American public,” spokeswoman Anna Kelly told *WSJ*. “There are no conflicts of interest.” She pointed to the familiar arrangement: Trump’s assets are in a trust managed by his children.

White House counsel David Warrington was equally definitive. “The President has no involvement in business deals that would implicate his constitutional responsibilities,” he said.

Trump distanced himself from the specifics. Asked about the UAE-linked investment in his family’s venture, [he told](#) reporters:

Well, I don’t know about it.... My sons are handling that.... I guess they get investments from different people.

That posture sits uneasily alongside the structure of the WLFIs. Trump sits on its board, and all the proceeds will ultimately accrue to him once his term ends.

The investor base also adds context. An analysis published by [Reuters](#) last October found that as of mid-September, of the 50 largest WLFIs wallets, 36 were foreign, holding roughly \$804 million. In other words, in a venture linked to a sitting U.S. president, foreign capital is not peripheral — it is structurally central.



Ethics Warnings

An October report covered by [The New American](#) concluded that “WLFI operates in a legally permissible but ethically questionable space.”

Legal experts were far less restrained. As noted by the *Journal*, Kathleen Clark, a Washington University law professor, said:

“This sure looks like a violation of the foreign emoluments clause, and more to the point, it looks like a bribe.”

The transaction, she said, “should be a five-alarm fire about the federal government being for sale.”

The Constitution’s [foreign emoluments clause](#) bars federal officeholders from accepting “any present, Emolument, Office, or Title” from a foreign state without congressional consent. The purpose is structural, not symbolic. It is meant to prevent U.S. officials from being influenced, directly or indirectly, by foreign governments through gifts, payments, or financial relationships.

Ty Cobb, a former Trump White House lawyer, said:

You don’t do business deals with the families of the leaders of foreign countries. It taints American foreign policy.

A White House official countered that any emolument claims are “bogus and irrelevant.”

The Bidens and Clintons

The comparisons to the previous administrations come naturally, though by today’s standards they feel almost rookie.

Estimates of the Biden family’s foreign-linked dealings were measured in the tens of millions. Former President Bill Clinton’s Clinton Foundation, at its height, drew as much as \$156 million from donors with business before the U.S. government.

At the time, those figures dominated headlines. They drove years of political warfare, investigations, and cable news panels covering the dangers of mixing public office with private benefit. Asked about the earlier reports of the WLFI’s deals with foreign entities, House Oversight Committee Chairman James Comer (R-Ky.) [signaled](#) no concerns, though. “As long as you disclose your income and disclose the sources, I think that’s acceptable.”



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