

NYT's 'Really Weird' Russiagate Story

Exclusive: The Russiagate narrative has taken a turn toward the surreal with a report in the *New York Times* alleging that U.S. spies paid a “shadowy Russian” \$100,000 for dirt on the president, explains Daniel Lazare.

By Daniel Lazare

A Russian national with ties to cybercrime and Russian intelligence snookered U.S. spooks out of \$100,000 by promising them fresh dirt on Donald Trump.

That's the takeaway from a strange front-page article that ran in last weekend's *New York Times*, “U.S. Spies, Seeking to Retrieve Cyberweapons, Paid Russian Peddling Trump Secrets.” That's not all the article said, but the rest was so convoluted and implausible that it can be safely discounted.



Even Matthew Rosenberg, the *Times* reporter who wrote the story, described it as “a really weird one” in an interview with Slate. More than merely weird, however, the piece offers valuable insight into the parallel universe that is Russiagate, one in which logic is absent, neo-McCarthyism is rampant, and evidence means whatever the corporate press wants it to mean.

The article says that the U.S. spies were seeking cyberweapons stolen from the National Security Agency by a group calling itself the Shadow Brokers in 2016, but that a “shadowy Russian” kept pushing instead evidence buttressing the “golden showers” episode in the Christopher Steele dossier. The spooks were not interested because they didn't want to soil their hands with “the stuff of tabloid gossip pages” and because they feared that the Russian was trying to drive a wedge between the intelligence agencies and the White House. As the article puts it:

“The United States intelligence officials ... were wary of being entangled in a Russian operation to create discord inside the American government. They were also fearful of political fallout in Washington if they were seen to be buying scurrilous information on the president.”

But Rosenberg's account raises a number of questions. One is why the spooks were “desperately” trying to retrieve stolen NSA hacking tools in the first place when, as cyber-security experts have warned, stolen malware is essentially

irretrievable for the simple reason that it can be copied endlessly in an instant. Once a secret is out, the damage is done – there's no getting it back.

Another concerns why U.S. agents would continue taking “multiple deliveries” of anti-Trump data beginning last October that “they made clear that they did not want.” Was the Russian unusually insistent? Or were the Americans less adamant than Rosenberg would have us believe?

Indeed, the article says that “at least four Russians with espionage and underworld connections have appeared in Central and Eastern Europe, offering to sell *kompromat* [i.e. compromising material] to American political operatives, private investigators and spies that would corroborate the [Steele] dossier.”

So it seems that demand for kompromat is as strong as it was in October 2016 when former FBI Director James Comey used the same unsubstantiated gossip to obtain a secret warrant to eavesdrop on an ex-Trump campaign aide named Carter Page.

Since the story about buying back malware doesn't make sense, could it be that kompromat is what the Americans were seeking all along? This is not the sort of thing that Trump would like to hear. The article says that Russia is out to spread material that will “cast doubt on the federal and congressional investigations into the Russian meddling” even though kompromat buttressing the Steele dossier would do the opposite. It says that the negotiations “ended this year with American spies chasing the Russian out of Western Europe, warning him not to return if he valued his freedom,” and that the anti-Trump material remains in the hands of an American go-between “who has secured it in Europe.”

Which raises more questions still. Can U.S. spies really lock up anyone they wish? And where, precisely, did the American stash the *kompromat* – and to what end? Rosenberg indicates that he also interviewed the purported Russian agent. But nowhere do we get his side of the story concerning what the Americans were really after.

The results are incoherent even by *Times* standards. One reason may be that Rosenberg dashed the story off at breakneck speed after long-time intelligence writer and former *Times*-man James Risen published [a similar piece](#) a few hours earlier in *The Intercept*. But another is that the Russiagate narrative that the *Times* is pushing is itself incoherent and that Rosenberg is guilty of nothing more than toeing the company line.

He let the cat out of the bag in the *Slate* interview, which ran shortly after the story appeared on the *Times* website:

“Spy games happen all the time, but you need a confluence of circumstances [for

this]: You need an election with Russian interference. You then need a president to win and deny interference ever happened and say there is no collusion. You need the Russians to say, 'Oh, wow, let's take advantage of this. This really worked out. Let's make it worse and start selling this stuff off.'"

Rosenberg continued: "What the Russians were committed to – what we really know – is that they were committed to messing with American democracy. ... If their goal here is messing with American democracy, then getting some of this stuff out on Donald Trump, if it's real, that's worse, weakens him further, intensifies the political mess we are in. So there are reasons to do that. Plus, if you can get this into American consciousness through American spy agencies or law enforcement, you will have set off the White House versus its own spies in a way that if you are a Russian spy, that's great. Disorder and dissension in the ranks of your enemies."

This is a reporter's mind on drugs, specifically the drug of boundless anti-Russian paranoia. But no matter how often the *Times* assures its readers that the Russians are out to get us, that they're messing with our democracy, that they sow "disorder and dissension" wherever they can because that's what Russians do – actual evidence, the stuff that sober minds require before making a judgment, remains remarkably thin.

Take Russian manipulation of social media, the subject of last November's bizarre Moscow-style "show trial" in which attorneys for Facebook, Twitter, and Google were hauled before a congressional panel to confess their sins in allowing the Kremlin to use their platforms to subvert the state. But the subversive Facebook ads that the alleged Kremlin-linked St. Petersburg "troll factory" known as the Internet Research Agency purchased added up to just \$46,000 worth by Election Day, a drop in the bucket compared to the \$81 million spent by the Trump and Clinton campaigns.

Politically, moreover, the ads were all over the map, some leaning right, some leaning left, and in one case, a page featuring photos of cute puppies, leaning in no apparent direction at all. Last September, *The Atlantic* tried to figure out what the Internet Research Agency was up to. But after some 1,200 words of huffing and puffing, the best the magazine could come up with was that the ad campaign "was too small to seriously influence the election, but too big to be an afterthought."

In other words, no one knows. In a rare moment of journalistic sanity, *Washington Post* reporter Philip Bump observed that the ad buys were "often modest, heavily dissociated from the campaign itself and minute in the context of election social media efforts."

As for Twitter, Bump notes that the 2,700-plus accounts believed to be Russian-linked generated just 202,000 tweets between January 2011 and August 2017, a no-less-negligible sum next to the one billion election-related tweets sent out during the fourteen months prior to Election Day.

Even if all this shows the secret hand of the Kremlin at work, the effort pales in comparison to that of Israel (AIPAC, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, is among the most powerful lobbies in Washington); the Arab gulf states (which finance virtually every major think tank in DC); Ukraine (which has proved surprisingly effective in swinging official opinion), and so forth.

It barely merits a four-graph story on page A16. Then there is the alleged Kremlin hack of the Democratic National Committee, the ur-crime that triggered the anti-Russian storm in the first place.

The January 2017 formal assessment by Director of National Intelligence James Clapper contained nothing by way of evidence that a break-in had occurred or that Russian intelligence was responsible. (WikiLeaks, the recipient of the purloined emails, continues to insist that it was an inside leak.) Even the *Times* conceded that the report was “unlikely to convince skeptics.”

Since the FBI never inspected the DNC’s computers first-hand, the only evidence comes from an Irvine, California, cyber-security firm known as CrowdStrike whose chief technical officer, Dmitri Alperovitch, a well-known Putin-phobe, is a fellow at the Atlantic Council, a Washington think tank that is also vehemently anti-Russian as well as a close Hillary Clinton ally.

Thus, Putin-basher Clinton hired Putin-basher Alperovitch to investigate an alleged electronic heist, and to absolutely no one’s surprise, his company concluded that guilty party was ... Vladimir Putin. Amazing! Since then, a small army of internet critics has chipped away at CrowdStrike for praising the hackers as among the best in the business yet declaring in the same breath that they gave themselves away by uploading a document in the name of “Felix Edmundovich,” i.e. Felix E. Dzerzhinsky, founder of the Soviet secret police.

As noted cyber-security expert Jeffrey Carr observed with regard to Russia’s two main intelligence agencies: “Raise your hand if you think that a GRU or FSB officer would add Iron Felix’s name to the metadata of a stolen document before he released it to the world while pretending to be a Romanian hacker. Someone clearly had a wicked sense of humor.”

None of this proves that Russian intelligence didn’t hack the DNC, merely that a lot more evidence is needed before accepting the word of professional CIA disinformation experts. But the *Times* lives in an evidence-free world in which

Russians are guilty regardless of what they do. Whether they're pro-Trump or anti, out to discredit the Mueller investigation or bolster it, the only thing that matters is that they're intent on sowing discord – and that U.S. intelligence agencies are blameless upholders of the rule of law.

The reduction ad absurdum occurred a few days later when CIA Director Mike Pompeo, FBI Director Christopher Wray, Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats, and other heavyweights testified before Congress that Russian interference in the 2018 midterm elections is already underway.

“Throughout the entire [intelligence] community,” declared Coats, “we have not seen any evidence of any significant change from last year” – which, loosely translated, means that evidence that Russia is on the warpath is as sparse today as it was previously. Since “President Trump continues to refuse to even acknowledge the malevolent Russian role,” a *Times* editorial concluded, the possibility that “he is giving Russia a green light to tamper with the 2018 elections ... can no longer be dismissed out of hand.”

All that was needed was for Editorial Page Editor James Bennet to hold up a list of 205 known Communists toiling away in the State Department. Trump is a reactionary, a con man, a bully, and much else besides. But with remarkable accuracy, liberals are obsessively zeroing in on the one thing he's not: a Russian agent.

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Russiagate Narrative Undercut by Nunes Memo

The key allegations of election meddling at the heart of Russiagate continue to lack supporting evidence, while on the other hand, evidence of overreach by investigators undermines the narrative of Trump-Russia collusion, reports Philip Giraldi.

By Philip Giraldi

The so-called Nunes Memo prepared for the Republican majority on the House of Representatives Intelligence Committee – even if possibly overblown – provides strong reason to believe that there was unwarranted and quite possibly illegal FBI surveillance of a former Trump staffer over completely legal Russian

business dealings. Meanwhile, regarding the key allegations of election meddling at the heart of Russiagate, the nine month-long investigation of Special Counsel Robert Mueller into Moscow's possible interference has so far only shown that it was Israel rather than Russia that meddled with the campaign by meeting with Trump associates and seeking favors.

Notably missing is any evidence that the Russian government did anything beyond the usual probing that intelligence agencies worldwide do when confronted by important developments in another country that is either a competitor or adversary.

An aspect of the Republican memo that has been scarcely commented upon in the avalanche of news reporting centered on the story is how the mainstream media is continuing to exercise a dangerous obsession with Russia and is insisting that the Russiagate inquiry should continue even more aggressively in spite of the concerns that the entire process has been politicized. There is nothing in the memo itself that indicates that Moscow actually tried to recruit any Trump associate as an agent or interfere in the U.S. election. The raison d'être for both the Congressional and Special Counsel Robert Mueller investigations therefore appears to be lacking. It might eventually emerge that Russia did little or even nothing beyond the usual probing and nosing around that intelligence agencies routinely do.

President Donald Trump, who had campaigned on a sensible pledge to seek better relations with Moscow, has provided only feeble resistance to the onslaught of the media and political class. He has recently allowed the Justice Department and Treasury to punish Russia's two major news outlets operating in the United States, RT America and Sputnik. They both have been forced to register as foreign agents, even though no other non-American news service operating in the United States has been compelled to do the same, while new allegations about perfidious Moscow surface weekly.

Two recent news reports illustrate perfectly just how out-of-control the Russia inquiry has become. At the end of January, the U.S. Treasury Department released the names of 210 alleged Kremlin insiders, including government ministers, who were being included on a list for possible sanctions, though it was also announced that no sanctions would be put in place pending further ongoing review of the behavior of those individuals under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act.

The so-called "Kremlin List" was clearly designed to put pressure on the inner circle of the Russian government as many of those named have major business ties with the United States and Western Europe that could be severely damaged through sanctions. The intention may have been to encourage those individuals to lessen

their support for President Vladimir Putin in the upcoming Russian national elections on March 18.

The Kremlin List has significantly impacted internal Russian politics ahead of a major election and therefore could be seen as the U.S.'s own attempt at election-meddling. It comes on top of a [British government claim](#) that Moscow intends to rip British "infrastructure apart, actually cause thousands and thousands and thousands of deaths," and create "total chaos within the country," as well as a [U.S. Senate report](#) that alleges a two decade-long assault by Putin "on democratic institutions, universal values, and the rule of law across Europe and in his own country."

The [second story](#), which is more bizarre than the first, describes how Congressman Adam Schiff told a University of Pennsylvania audience that Russian-promoted ads during the 2016 election encouraged people to exercise their Second Amendment rights to own guns. Per Schiff, "the Russians would be thrilled if we were doing nothing but killing each other very day, and sadly we are." So now the Russians, apparently, are responsible not only for Donald Trump getting elected, but also for the U.S. epidemic of gun violence.

Neither Congressman Schiff's meanderings nor the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act serve any conceivable United States national interest – and the Nunes Memo demonstrates, if anything, that the evidence for Russian interference in the U.S. election is elusive at best.

If the alleged Russiagate conspiracy is never actually demonstrated, which looks increasingly likely, it would certainly disappoint the many American talking heads and media "experts" who have been building careers off of bashing Moscow 24/7, but it might also provide a window for the White House to fulfill its electoral promise to fix the Russia relationship.

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Poverty Protests at RNC/DNC Conventions

For decades, Democrats like Republicans have shied away from talking much about poverty, but America's severe income inequality has made the plight of the poor a national crisis, notes Dennis J Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

True concern about the plight of America's poor and disenfranchised has been low on the priority lists of both the Republican and Democratic parties for many years, a challenge that Cheri Honkala, a long-time warrior for the poor and disenfranchised, has taken to the two conventions in Cleveland and Philadelphia.

As National Coordinator of the Poor Peoples' Economic Human Rights Campaign and the founder of the Kensington Welfare Rights Union, Honkala participated a Poor People's March through the streets of Cleveland at the Republican National Convention and, from her home base in Philadelphia, sought to bring the same issues to the Democratic National Convention.

I caught up with her in Cleveland on July 22 as she was poised to march through heavily guarded streets at the Republican convention "to send a strong message that we are against the racists and inhumane policies of the Republican National Committee, and are outraged at the idea of having Trump or Hillary for president in this country."

Dennis Bernstein: What kind of a president do you think Trump would make? How do you think he would impact on the poor?

Cheri Honkala: Well, [...] in all seriousness, if Trump becomes our president, we have to begin to get serious about organizing soldiers across this country to organize the New American Spring. Because we are currently not surviving in this country. And if either Trump or Hillary are elected, we're in big trouble.

And, so, we are out here on the streets. We are not going to be afraid of the police. We're not going to be afraid of, you know, people telling us that we have to choose one person of the lesser evil. We're going to go forward and lift our voices, and envision a different kind of world. We're going to make that new world.

DB: You're about to lead this march...in Cleveland. Could you talk about what are some of the multiple struggles that poor people face, that you represent? What are the kinds of everyday struggles we're talking about now?

CH: Well, a big thing that we're dealing with now is the nonprofit industrial complex, where many mega-organizations are getting multi-million dollar budgets and still can't find ways to house poor people in this country. And it's a question of greed.

And we need so many things. Healthcare— we need single payer healthcare in this country. Most everybody I know, they are missing all of their back teeth because they had them pulled because they can't afford the dentist. Our children can't afford glasses. Adults are also going without glasses. I know somebody who had potential bladder cancer and the public health clinic didn't pay for that.

Most everybody I know in Kensington [neighborhood in Philadelphia], especially single males, are living on less than two dollars a day, but sometimes go weeks without a dollar. So, there's just no way to give justice, to describe what people are having to live with.

Not to mention that both of these major parties have allocated millions of dollars to add to the police state. And we continue to see young black lives shot down around this country, and we cannot sit by just as spectators and watch these things.

I'm very hopeful because I know that, as a mom, mothers out there, they love their kids. And they're not going to settle for a lower standard of living. It's inhumane and non-Christian. We're going to rise from the ashes and we're going to change this thing around.

DB: Could you talk a little bit about the way in which things seem to be progressing against the poor? Many people who have been dealing with the authorities, in recent years, around poor and homelessness find there's a move to really criminalize the poor, in a formal way. Could you tell us about that?

CH: In the 80's, you know, there was actually like a little bit of consciousness, [it was] kinda trendy. But now, if you're a poor person and you're homeless and you're on the corner and you put up a sign, you're pretty much going to get a brick thrown at your head. They institutionalized the institution under the other Clinton, Bill Clinton, they ended welfare as you know it. And like in my neighborhood, the number one source of income used to be welfare, and now the number one source of income is drugs. And so if peoples' lives are not exploitable, they're expendable.

And this is not the kind of world that I want for my children. And I say world, because I also care what's happening to the poor around the entire world. It's not okay for us to just focus and think about and focus on the poor here in this country. Whoever becomes president in our country is going to have impact on poor folks throughout the world. And, I'm tired, I'm tired of having a Democrat or a Republican continue to bomb and kill people around the world. I think it's time that we nurture and we give birth to an independent political party in this country.

It's no secret that I was Jill Stein's running mate in 2012. She's being totally blacked out by the media. But I'm happy to see all the Bernie supporters that are flocking to Dr. Jill Stein, because people understand that we're never going to change the position of the poor in this country if we continue to support Pepsi or Coke. And so we need to give our children more than corporate controlled political parties.

DB: Do you see the situation for the poor getting noticeably worse? Are there more families on the street? Are there more children who are hungry? Do you see this getting worse?

CH: Yeah, just the other day in Philadelphia there was a ten year old little boy that died from a bowel obstruction. And he died because the Department of Human Services Child Protection had its certificate taken away, because of the horrible conditions that foster kids are living in, in Philadelphia. And so there's people taking kids away from moms and then not monitoring the conditions that they're living in. And it was a ten year old little boy's life. He didn't have to die.

And that's pretty much the story for low-income families across this entire country. It's our families that are feeling the bruises, it's our families that are suffering from malnutrition. It's our families that don't have the health care. And I've been in this anti-poverty movement for over 30 years now. And whenever I think it can't get any worse, it takes another dive.

And so, in my community, you're seeing whole segments of people that are permanently unemployed. And, I guess, it's really true what's happening with electronics and technology, that people, labor is totally being replaced. You know, I respect the fight for 15 across the entire country, but the corporations have been busy having different automations so that they can replace even fast food workers. So we've got our work cut out for us. Either we take charge of our country or the corporations are going to take charge. And that's as simple as it gets.

DB: And, you're about the lead this march in Cleveland...

CH: In about 5 minutes; People are signaling for me to get off the phone.

DB: We appreciate your time. Before we say goodbye, tell us about your response to the massive show of force by law enforcement. Do you feel intimidated by the level of police, and various military forces that are there? Will you go ahead in spite of all kinds of threats that we hear about now?

CH: Yes, we should not be ruled by fear. It's time to determine what we do in our lives and, as they say, we have to rage against the machine and go forward and take our country back. And that's what people in front-line communities are planning to do.

DB: And you're serious, you find no difference between a Hillary Clinton and in a Donald Trump when it comes right down to the issues that affect the poor and disinherited in this country and around the world?

CH: Yeah. It's going to be a painful process, but it's time. All what we have to do is think about the poor that are dying in other parts of the world, and it's very clear to us that our solidarity goes beyond the borders of this country. But that we actually care about what happens to families across the entire world. And so that means to not have somebody that supports war as our next president. And so I'm not with her.

Dennis J Bernstein is a host of "Flashpoints" on the Pacifica radio network and the author of *Special Ed: Voices from a Hidden Classroom*. You can access the audio archives at www.flashpoints.net.

Robert Parry Discusses the "AIPAC 'Pander-off'"

Consortiumnews' Assistant Editor Chelsea Gilmour interviewed Robert Parry regarding his recently published article, [The Clinton/Trump AIPAC 'Pander-Off'](#). The following video is a recording of their discussion.

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon and BarnesandNoble.com](#)).

Clinton Stalls on Goldman Sachs Speeches

Exclusive: Hillary Clinton has judged that she can wait out public calls for her to release the transcripts of speeches to Goldman Sachs, which earned her \$675,000 in 2013, since she expects to soon wrap up the Democratic presidential nomination, as Chelsea Gilmour describes.

By Chelsea Gilmour

One of Bernie Sander's standard attack lines against Hillary Clinton has been to call attention to the hundreds of thousands of dollars in paid-speaking fees and donations that Clinton has received from Wall Street during her career, including \$675,000 for three paid speeches to Goldman Sachs (at \$225,000 a

pop) after she left the State Department in 2013.

Sanders has even taken to keeping track of how long it's been since Clinton vowed to release the transcripts but hasn't. Clinton now claims that she is being held to a different standard than other candidates and will release the speech transcripts only when others do the same, "if everybody does it, and that includes Republicans."

Sanders has responded by noting that he has given no paid speeches to Wall Street banks and thus has no such transcripts to release. So, Clinton's campaign continues to scramble, trying to shield her from the impression that she is too cozy with Wall Street while expecting that she will soon lock up the Democratic presidential nomination and make Sanders's criticism moot.

The backlash Clinton has received over the three Goldman Sachs speeches and her ties to Wall Street has, however, forced Clinton to confront an issue which has dogged her campaign from the outset: Namely, that she is an Establishment candidate with close personal and political ties to Wall Street and Big Business, which compromises her objectivity and accountability as a candidate "for the people," rather than for the corporations.

During a debate in New Hampshire, Clinton claimed Sanders' innuendo amounted to a "very artful smear." Clinton's press secretary Brian Fallon called it "character assassination by insinuation," by implying that Clinton would not be tough on Wall Street because she has financially benefited from them in the past.

So far, Clinton has responded to these criticisms rather unconvincingly. Under intense pressure to release the transcripts of the Goldman Sachs speeches, she has said she would "look into it," though the Wall Street Journal has reported that Mrs. Clinton has the sole right to distribute the transcripts, with Politico asserting, "One thing that is clear is that Clinton could release the Goldman transcripts unilaterally if she chose to do so."

Political Damage

The real danger in releasing the transcripts is the potential political fodder it would provide Clinton's opponents, who might seek to use the transcripts as proof that Clinton is in the pocket of, not only Goldman Sachs, but Wall Street as a whole.

But the negative insinuations are already there, as Politico related in the story of an unnamed source who attended one of Clinton's Goldman Sachs speeches in Arizona. The source related the tone and content of Clinton's speech that day as a "rah-rah speech," where Clinton came off sounding more like a "Goldman

Sachs managing director.”

Politico reported, “‘It was pretty glowing about us,’” one person who watched the event said. “‘It’s so far from what she sounds like as a candidate now.’”

The Wall Street Journal summarized the speeches as such: “She didn’t often talk about the financial crisis, but when she did, she almost always struck an amicable tone, according to these people.

“In some cases, she thanked the audience for what they had done for the country, the people said. One attendee said the warmth with which Mrs. Clinton greeted guests bordered on ‘gushy.’ ...

“She spoke sympathetically about the financial industry, according to an attendee. Asked about the poisoned national mood toward Wall Street, Mrs. Clinton didn’t single out bankers or any other group for causing the 2008 financial crisis.”

So far, Clinton seems to have judged that the damage from continuing to hide the transcripts is preferable to the backlash she might experience if she released them.

According to Politico, “The person who saw Clinton’s Arizona remarks to Goldman said they thought there was no chance the campaign would ever release them.

“It would bury her against Sanders,” this person said. “It really makes her look like an ally of the firm.”

In that case, releasing the transcripts could serve a severe blow to her campaign. Sanders’ campaign would waste no time capitalizing on the opportunity to call-out Clinton as a friend of Wall Street.

Republicans candidates could jump on the attack-train, too, although this would be a bit like the Right holding up a mirror to itself, since every Republican candidate except Trump has been the beneficiary of Wall Street’s financial “generosity.” (And Trump is arguable. Although he may not receive direct donations from Big Banks & Business, he is certainly an “Established” member of that social circle, so there are questions to be raised of political influence.)

Whose Side Are You On?

Regardless, as it becomes clear that this campaign is breaking down to “Establishment” vs. “Anti-Establishment” candidates, Clinton’s ties to her Wall Street and Beltway-Insider past are harming her ability to cultivate broad support amongst a population of voters resentful of Wall Street’s insidious influence over Washington.

So what is Clinton saying about all this? Not much. And what she has said has not diminished suspicions that she would be soft on Wall Street, if elected.

Besides vague promises to “look into releasing” her speech transcripts, Clinton has defended her acceptance of the speaking fees in even vaguer terms. Anderson Cooper pressed her at a town hall meeting in New Hampshire, asking, “But did you have to be paid \$675,000 [for three speeches to Goldman Sachs]?” Clinton responded to hearty laughter from the crowd, “Well, I don’t know. That’s what they offered.”

She continued, saying she didn’t feel the fees represent a conflict of interest since she came back to run for public office, because she had not yet committed to running. She said further, “Anybody who knows me, who thinks that they can influence me, name anything they’ve influenced me on, just name one thing. I’m out here every day saying, I’m gonna shut them down, I’m going after them, I’m going to jail them if they should be jailed, I’m going to break them up. I mean, they’re not giving me very much money now, I can tell you that much. Fine with me. I’m proud to have 90 percent of my donations from small donors and 60 percent, the highest ever, from women, which I’m really, really proud of.”

Cooper pushed, “So, just to be clear, that’s not something you regret, those three speeches?”

“No, I don’t, because I don’t feel that I paid any price for it and I’m very clear about what I will do and they’re on notice,” Clinton asserted.

Clinton has pushed back in other ways, too. For instance, during a New Hampshire debate, Clinton called out what she saw as hypocrisy from Sanders’s campaign: “Senator Sanders took about \$200,000 from Wall Street firms. Not directly, but through the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee. There was nothing wrong with that. It hasn’t changed his view! Well, it didn’t change my view or my vote either!”

A Flip-Flop

But not everyone is buying it. In an often-cited incident, Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Massachusetts, described in 2004 how Hillary Clinton flip-flopped on a credit-card company-sponsored bankruptcy bill under pressure as a New York Senator.

According to Warren, in the late-1990s, then-President Bill Clinton was pursuing signing into law a bankruptcy bill which had been presented to Congress and written by the credit card companies. President Clinton was eager to sign the bill, in order to further promote his free-trade, neoliberal economic policies.

However, after a meeting between Warren and then-First Lady Hillary Clinton, in which Warren explained how the bill would have disproportionately hurt single mothers, Hillary vowed, "Professor Warren, we've got to stop that awful bill." Indeed, Hillary returned to the White House and convinced the President to veto the bill as one of his last acts in office.

But then, once Hillary became Senator for New York, the bill was reintroduced to Congress and she voted in favor of it. Warren explains, "As Senator Clinton, the pressures are very different. It's a well-financed industry. A lot of people don't realize that the industry that gave the most money to Washington over the past few years was not the oil industry, was not pharmaceuticals, it was consumer credit products. Those are the people, the credit card companies, [who] have been giving money and they have influence. ... [Hillary Clinton] has taken money from the groups and more to the point, she worries about them as a constituency."

And what about her claim that 90 percent of her donations come from small donors? According to 24/7 Wall Street, which conducted an investigation into each candidate's net worth, "While 69% of Sanders' campaign contributions have come from small individual donations, ... only 17% of Clinton's contributions have come from small individual donations."

Another interesting development from this hubbub about Clinton's ties to Wall Street has to do with whom Clinton would appoint as Treasury Secretary, if elected. Sanders's reference during the Jan. 17 debate to the two Goldman Sachs executives who became Treasury Secretaries may have spurred Clinton to address the issue.

At that debate Sanders said, "Goldman Sachs, paying a five billion dollar fine, gives this country in recent history a Republican Secretary of Treasury, a Democratic Secretary of Treasury."

Sanders's comment referenced the appointment of Robert Rubin, former Goldman Sachs executive, to the position of Treasury Secretary by Bill Clinton after Rubin opened doors to Wall Street donors during Clinton's first Presidential bid.

Rubin was instrumental in crafting "an economic policy – known as Rubinomics – that was applauded by Wall Street but viewed critically by many on the left. When then-first lady Hillary Clinton decided to run for the Senate in New York in 2000, she turned to Rubin and Altman to introduce her to key players on Wall Street," reported the Washington Post.

Who to Name?

Hillary Clinton addressed the Treasury Secretary issue on "Meet the Press," saying, "You have to have a Treasury Secretary who understands the economy ... I think there are a lot more places where one can and should look for such a Treasury Secretary."

If Clinton were to make a clear promise not to appoint someone from Wall Street as Treasury Secretary, she could quell some voters' fears. But to be sure, this was not such a promise. The Treasury Secretary issue may also have been identified by the Clinton campaign as an opportunity to strike back at Sanders for what Clinton perceives as his political naivety.

Bloomberg News reported, "On the show, Clinton said Sanders has been less aggressive than she in pursuing abuses in the financial industry, adding that her rival's critique of the banking system and its role in the economy is simplistic."

But there is another issue regarding paid speeches that has yet to be fully addressed by the media, which may prove to be a further thorn in Hillary's side. That is the question of Bill Clinton and the "two-for-one" aspect of the Clinton's political machine.

An article by the Wall Street Journal relates how Hillary Clinton, while Secretary of State in 2009, helped Swiss bank UBS with its IRS woes. "Total donations by UBS to the Clinton Foundation grew from less than \$60,000 through 2008 to a cumulative total of about \$600,000 by the end of 2014, according to the foundation and the bank.

"The bank also joined the Clinton Foundation to launch entrepreneurship and inner-city loan programs, through which it lent \$32 million. And it paid former president Bill Clinton \$1.5 million to participate in a series of question-and-answer sessions with UBS Wealth Management Chief Executive Bob McCann, making UBS his biggest single corporate source of speech income disclosed since he left the White House."

While this still does not prove a direct link between favors by Hillary and payments received, it further blurs the line of where the Clintons' political activities stop and their personal ventures start.

Earlier in the campaign, I wrote an article analyzing the sum of Hillary's paid speeches during the 14-month interim between Clinton leaving the State Department and before announcing her candidacy for President. That interim spanned January 2014 through March 2015, and resulted in Hillary making 53 paid speeches to the tune of \$11.8 million dollars in fees, all while it was widely believed that Clinton would run again for President in 2016. That analysis,

however, did not include the \$675,000 from Goldman Sachs, as those speeches were delivered in 2013, meaning they occurred before the time period for which she was obligated to publicly disclose her income.

Bill Clinton's Speeches

Further investigation of Hillary Clinton's financial disclosure form shows at least 16 speeches made by Bill Clinton to banks or other financial service industry companies during that 14-month period.

Besides three speeches to USB Wealth Management totaling \$675,000 (the same amount Hillary received for her Goldman speeches, by the way), Bill also gave paid speeches to: Bank of America (\$500,000), SCIP Capital Management (\$250,000), Deutsche Bank AG (\$270,000 + \$280,000 to Hillary for her October 7, 2014 speech), Veritas Capital Fund Management (\$250,000), Apollo Management Holdings (\$250,000), Texas-China Business Council (\$265,000), Affiliated Managers Group (\$225,000), Experian (\$225,000), Insurance Accounting and Systems Association (\$225,000), Centerview Partners (\$225,000), Jefferies (\$225,000), Citadel (\$250,000), and Thomas Lloyd Global Assets Management (Schweiz) (\$200,000 via satellite).

That means that Bill Clinton was paid \$4,035,000 by the financial sector for 16 appearances over the course of 14 months. Keep in mind, those 14 months represent the interregnum between when Hillary Clinton left State Department and before she officially announced her candidacy (but it was widely speculated she would run).

Regardless of whether Hillary believes (or will admit) that her fees from the financial industry have influenced her policies or not, the fact that campaign finance law requires her to disclose her spouse's income should be a guiding indication of what the rest of us already know: that payments made to one's spouse or close family members can equally represent a conflict of interest, just as if the candidate had been paid directly.

An incisive article by Walter Russell Mead explains how the Clintons have worked this system to build the first "postmodern political machine."

"The Clintons stand where money, influence, and celebrity form a nexus. When Hillary Clinton was running the State Department and Bill Clinton was shaking down contributors to the Foundation, the donors knew, or thought they knew, what they were getting. Now that Hillary is running for President, the donors have an even better idea of what good things might come to them – or what problems and complications could develop if they cut the Clintons off."

Mead calls it "honest graft," quoting Tammany Hall's George Washington Plunkett.

“The cash comes from donations and speaking fees. When the husband of the Secretary of State or potential next President calls about a special charity project, most people, even if they happen to be CEOs of major companies or senior government officials, take the call. More than that, there will be times when government and corporate officials will reach out and make the call themselves, rather than waiting passively to hear that the Clinton machine has an ask. The donor proposition is rock solid. ... What donors buy, or think they are buying, is influence and face time with two of the most powerful people in the world and their political machine[.]”

One parting thought: Goldman Sachs CEO Lloyd Blankfein, from the same Goldman Sachs who paid Hillary \$675,000 for three speeches and produced Bill Clinton’s Treasury Secretary, has said Bernie Sanders’ critique of Wall Street “has the potential to be a dangerous moment, not just for Wall Street, not just for the people who are particularly targeted, but for anybody who is a little bit out of line.”

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Clinton Still Hides Her Speeches

After serving as Secretary of State and before starting her run for President, Hillary Clinton amassed millions of dollars in speaking fees from big banks and corporate interests with business before the federal government – and she won’t say what she said, as Marjorie Cohn points out.

By Marjorie Cohn

Hillary Clinton refuses to make public the transcripts of her speeches to big banks, three of which were worth a total of \$675,000 to Goldman Sachs. She says she would release the transcripts “if everybody does it, and that includes Republicans.” After all, she complained, “Why is there one standard for me, and not for everybody else?”

As the New York Times editorial board pointed out, “The only different standard here is the one Mrs. Clinton set for herself, by personally earning \$11 million in 2014 and the first quarter of 2015 for 51 speeches to banks and other groups and industries.”

Hillary Clinton is not running in the primaries against Republicans, who, the Times noted, “make no bones about their commitment to Wall Street deregulation and tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans.” She is running against Bernie Sanders, “a decades-long critic of Wall Street excess who is hardly a hot ticket on the industry speaking circuit,” according to the Times.

Why do voters need to know what Hillary told the banks? Because it was Wall Street that was responsible for the 2008 recession, making life worse for most Americans. We need to know what, if anything, she promised these behemoths. There is an old saying: I Scratch Your Back, You Scratch Mine.

Clinton has several super PACs, which have recently donated \$25 million to her campaign, \$15 million of which came from Wall Street. Big banks and large contributors don't give their money away for nothing. They expect that their interests will be well served by those to whom they donate.

Clinton recently attended an expensive fundraiser at Franklin Square Capital, a hedge fund that gives big bucks to the fracking industry. Two weeks later, her campaign announced her continuing support for the production of natural gas, which comes from fracking.

Sanders opposes fracking. He said, “Just as I believe you can't take on Wall Street while taking their money, I don't believe you can take on climate change effectively while taking money from those who would profit off the destruction of the planet.”

Bernie's “Political Revolution”

Sanders has no super PACs. His campaign has received 4 million individual contributions, that average \$27 each. Perhaps Rupert Murdoch multiplied that amount by \$100 in setting \$2,700 a head as the entrance fee for Clinton's latest campaign gala?

Sanders has called for a “political revolution” that “takes on the fossil fuel billionaires, accelerates our transition to clean energy, and finally puts people before the profits of polluters.” He would retrain workers in the fossil fuel industries for clean energy jobs.

Sanders reminds us that the top one-tenth of 1 percent owns nearly as much wealth as the bottom 90 percent, and 99 percent of all new income goes to the top 1 percent. Unlike Clinton, he says healthcare is a right – not a privilege – and college and university tuition should be free.

Sanders and Congressman John Conyers introduced legislation to allocate \$5.5 billion to states and communities to create employment programs for African-

American youth. They say, “instead of putting military style equipment into police departments . . . we [should] start investing in jobs for the young people there who desperately need them.”

How will we pay for all that? “If we cut military spending and corporate welfare, we would have more than enough money to meet America’s needs,” Sanders wrote in his 1997 book, *Outsider in the House*. “This nation currently spends \$260 billion a year on defense, even though the Cold War is over,” not counting “\$30 billion spent annually on intelligence or the \$20 billion in defense-related expenditures hidden away in our federal spending on energy,” he added.

Today, with all the wars our government is prosecuting, that figure is nearly \$600 billion.

Marjorie Cohn is a professor at Thomas Jefferson School of Law and former president of the National Lawyers Guild. Her most recent book is *Drones and Targeted Killing: Legal, Moral, and Geopolitical Issues*. Follow her on twitter at @marjoriecohn.
