

# THE FED PAGE

## For wealthy, Republicans get to be chosen ones



Al Kamen  
IN THE LOOP

Rep. **Michele Bachmann** (R-Minn.) won the Loop's Quote of the Week back in March for saying, "I just thank God that there's a billionaire or two on our side. All the

billionaires seem to be on the radical left, so I'm glad that we have a couple on ours."

But the retiring congresswoman will be glad to know that the number of billionaire GOP backers far exceeds "a couple."

Real estate Web site Movoto created a map to show the wealthiest Americans in each state, and what they're worth.

There are plenty of rich political donors shoveling obscene amounts of money to candidates in both parties, but after culling the Center for Responsive Politics' OpenSecrets database, we found that in the states where the wealthiest residents have made personal political contributions — meaning not from their company's organization or PAC — the richest in 34 states, or close to 70 percent, have given exclusively, or mostly, to Republicans.

Here are the top 10 wealthiest and whom they give to:

**Bill Gates, Washington, former CEO of Microsoft — Democrats**

Worth: \$76 billion  
The richest man in the country, Gates has given \$15,000 to both the Democratic and Republican congressional campaign committees this year, but he has given almost exclusively to Democratic candidates this cycle. In 2012, he gave \$5,000 to **President Obama** and \$12,900 to the Democratic National Committee. He gave \$50,000 toward Obama's inauguration in 2009.

**Warren Buffett, Nebraska, CEO of Berkshire Hathaway — Democrats**

Worth: \$58.2 billion  
Buffett is a big supporter of Obama and for at least the past four years has given about \$30,000 annually to the Democratic National Committee.

**Lawrence Ellison, California, co-founder of Oracle Corp. — Republicans**

Worth: \$48 billion  
Ellison gave \$3 million to the Restore Our Future PAC in 2012, the super PAC supporting **Mitt Romney's** presidential campaign. He has given to a mix of GOP and Democratic candidates over the years, but most of his recent donations have gone to Republicans such as House Speaker **John A. Boehner** (Ohio) and Senate Minority Leader **Mitch McConnell** (Ky.).

**Charles and David Koch, Kansas/New York, co-owners of Koch Industries — Republicans**



NICHOLAS KAMM/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE VIA GETTY IMAGES

**Bill Gates has given \$15,000 to both the Democratic and the Republican congressional campaign committees this year.**

Worth: \$40 billion each  
The Koch brothers have spent millions to influence American politics through their nonprofit Americans for Prosperity, but each has given personally as well. Charles, for instance, has donated thousands this year to national GOP committees and candidates such as **Tom Cotton**, who is running for the Senate in Arkansas, and to **McConnell**. His brother David has also made similar deep-pocketed contributions.

**Sheldon Adelson, Nevada, CEO of Las Vegas Sands Corp. — Republicans**

Worth: \$37.5 billion  
Adelson's support for Republicans is well documented. After funneling \$15 million into **Newt Gingrich's** primary campaign, he gave \$10 million to Restore Our Future in 2012, in all spending more than \$100 million to try to beat Obama in the last presidential campaign cycle.

**Christy Walton, Wyoming, Alice Walton, Texas, and Jim Walton, Arkansas, heirs of Sam Walton, founder of Wal-Mart — mixed**

Worth: \$36.7 billion, \$35 billion, \$34.7 billion, respectively  
Christy Walton has given throughout her life, but this cycle has given to only one candidate: Sen. **Cory Booker** (D-N.J.). Alice Walton has a long history of supporting Republican candidates. She gave \$200,000 to Restore Our Future in 2012 and \$10,000 to the Texas Conservatives Fund. But this cycle, she has jumped on the **Hillary Rodham Clinton** bandwagon, giving \$25,000 to Ready for Hillary, the super PAC gearing up for a possible Clinton 2016 presidential run. Jim Walton has given \$13,000 to the NRSC and \$5,000 to Republican Party of Arkansas this year. He gave \$200,000 to Restore Our Future in the 2011-2012 cycle.

**Jacqueline Mars, Virginia, daughter of founder of Mars Inc. — Republicans**

Worth: \$21 billion  
Mars gave \$23,500 to the RNC in 2012. She has donated over the

years to Rep. **Frank Wolf** (R-Va.) and supported Romney in 2012.

**Crime of opportunity**

Newly minted Secretary of Housing and Urban Development **Julian Castro** addressed a boisterous crowd of employees at his swearing-in ceremony last week.

With President Obama standing by and HUD employees whooping and hollering in the agency's auditorium, Castro declared that "HUD is the Department of Opportunity."

A nice sentiment, but wait a minute. Where have we heard that before?

Ah, yes, it was last September, when new Labor Secretary **Thomas Perez**, being sworn in by **Vice President Biden** in front of an equally enthusiastic crowd, declared, "The Department of Labor is the Department of Opportunity."

Guess you just can't have enough opportunity.

**A ruby Tuesday**

U.S. Court of Appeals Judge **Janice Brown** began her opinion Tuesday in an election law case thusly:

"The iconic musician **Mick Jagger** famously mused," she wrote, that "you can't always get what you want. But if you try sometimes, well, you just might find, you get what you need."

As would be expected in court rulings, she included a citation: "The Rolling Stones, You Can't Always Get What You Want, on Let It Bleed (Decca Records 1969)." The court noted that Judge **Thomas Griffith** joined the opinion in full while Judge **David Sentelle**, obviously aware it was only rock-and-roll, merely "concur[red] in the judgment" in the case: *Stop This Insanity Inc. Employee Leadership Fund v. Federal Election Commission*.

This earns Brown the first Loop award for best lead in a court opinion — appellate level. That should give the Stones some satisfaction.

**With Colby Itkowitz**

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## Medicare irregularities raise suspicion

Watchdog report: HIV prescription fraud may have cost millions in '12

BY CHARLES ORNSTEIN  
ProPublica

Medicare spent more than \$30 million in 2012 on questionable HIV medication costs, the inspector general of the Department of Health and Human Services said in a report set for release Wednesday.

The report offers a litany of possible fraud schemes, all paid for by Medicare's prescription drug program known as Part D.

Among the most egregious: In Detroit, a 77-year-old woman purportedly filled \$33,500 worth of prescriptions for 10 different HIV medications. But there's no record that she had HIV or that she had visited the doctors who wrote the scripts.

A 48-year-old in Miami went to 28 pharmacies to pick up HIV drugs worth nearly \$200,000, almost 10 times what average patients get in a year. The prescriptions were supposedly written by 16 health providers.

And on a single day, a third patient received \$17,500 worth of HIV drugs — and none the rest of the year. She acquired more than twice the recommended dose of five HIV drug ingredients.

The report raises new questions about Medicare's stewardship of Part D. A ProPublica series last year showed that Medicare's lax oversight has enabled doctors to prescribe massive quantities of inappropriate medications, wasted billions on needlessly expensive drugs and exposed the program to rampant fraud. Part D cost taxpayers about \$65 billion in 2013.

Previous inspector general reports have criticized the way Medicare oversees doctors and pharmacies, but this one focuses on patients and potential fraud and abuse.

The inspector general flagged 1,578 Medicare beneficiaries who received HIV medications worth

\$32 million in 2012. (This figure does not include beneficiaries who, based on their records, appeared to be taking the drug Truvada, which reduces the risk of HIV infection.)

More than half the patients identified by the inspector general had no diagnosis of HIV, had no records of laboratory tests to monitor the use of the drugs, and had not received any medical services from any of the prescribers.

Two pharmacies, both in Miami, dispensed drugs to 321 of these beneficiaries. Most of them were women with an average age of 74, two decades older than the typical patient who received HIV drugs in Medicare. These two pharmacies collected more than \$350,000 for the drugs, the inspector general reported.

"While some of this utilization may be legitimate, all of these patterns warrant further scrutiny," the report says. "These patterns may indicate that a beneficiary is receiving inappropriate drugs and diverting them for sale on the black market. They may also indicate that a pharmacy is billing for drugs that a beneficiary never received or that a beneficiary's identification number was stolen."

The inspector general's analysis did not say if beneficiaries were complicit in the questionable activity or if their IDs had been used without their knowledge.

Medicare places a premium on getting patients their medications in a timely way, particularly for conditions such as HIV. It considers HIV drugs a "protected class." Insurance companies paid to administer Part D for the government must cover them without exception.

Insurers are freer, however, to manage other drugs, and can impose restrictions to control spending, prevent overuse and spot fraud.

The unscrupulous have tried to exploit the special status of HIV drugs, leading to a number of recent prosecutions against pharmacy owners and others. Sometimes pharmacies bill for

the drugs, do not dispense them, and then bill Medicare or private insurers for them again. Beneficiaries may be misusing the HIV drugs, too; the inspector general noted that some medications have psychoactive effects or enhance the effects of painkillers.

The amount of suspicious activity involving HIV drugs is small relative to the overall usage of such medications. Medicare paid \$2.8 billion to supply HIV drugs to 135,500 beneficiaries in 2012.

Fully 38 percent of beneficiaries with questionable utilization patterns lived in Miami or New York, a rate three times the percent of patients receiving HIV drugs who live in those cities.

One 37-year-old in Miami received \$146,160 in HIV drugs in 2012. He received 16 different HIV medications in a single month.

"Several times during the year, he received these drugs from two different pharmacies on the same day," the report says.

The inspector general recommended that the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services take steps to rein in fraud and abuse of HIV drugs, including using prescription data to look for aberrant behavior among beneficiaries. The report says health plans should be required to conduct reviews looking for unusual patterns of HIV medication use. It also encourages Medicare to expand the ability of health insurers to put controls in place and restrict certain beneficiaries to a limited number of pharmacies or prescribers.

CMS generally agreed with the recommendations and said it would be open to Congress taking steps to limit the number of pharmacies or prescribers for beneficiaries who appear to be abusing drugs or engaging in fraud.

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To check how your doctor prescribes drugs in the Medicare program and compares with peers, check out the "Prescriber Checkup" tool at [propublica.org/checkup](http://propublica.org/checkup).

## Poll: Paying more for roads disliked

BY ASHLEY HALSEY III

When members of Congress climbed into trains, planes and automobiles for a five-week hiatus from Washington last week, one phrase probably rang through their heads: "kicking the can down the road."

An apt metaphor for what they had just done with transportation funding, the phrase was invoked dozens of times that final week on the floor of both houses, in newspaper editorials and by advocacy groups.

What they hear from folks back home may come as a tacit endorsement for more of the same, based on the findings of a new Associated Press poll. Though most Americans say they think roads, rail lines and airports are important, they'd rather not to pay more for them.

The easiest fast fix to bolster the sagging Highway Trust Fund, which pays for road and transit projects, would be to increase the 18.4-cents-per-gallon federal gas tax. Just 12 percent of those surveyed said they favored that option, according to the new AP-GfK poll, while 58 percent said they were opposed.

"It's hardly surprising that the public isn't clamoring to pay more for the road projects they want, but that means it's up to lawmakers to make tough decisions and lead," said Stephen Ellis, vice president of the nonpartisan Taxpayers for Common Sense. "Kicking the transportation funding can down the road is no longer an option because lawmakers are running out of gimmicky offsets. They either have to increase revenue through gas taxes, vehicle miles traveled, or reduce spending. Funding shouldn't be coming

through the general fund or tax holiday on foreign profits."

Ellis said the trust-fund crisis was a microcosm of the federal budget.

"The public wants a lot more government and services than they are willing to pay for," he said.

Despite all the protests about can-kicking, that's just what Congress did before leaving town, using accounting gimmicks to find \$10.8 billion in cash that will keep transportation money flowing until May 31.

There's no chance of movement on the issue before the November election, but Senate Democrats plan to push for a long-term funding solution during the lame-duck session.

Nothing in the AP survey will help lawmakers decide which option they should get behind in redefining the way the nation pays for transportation. The trust fund can't keep up with need and would have run into the red this month were it not for last week's eleventh-hour cash extension.

The survey revealed that people are aware of the problem. A third said roads and bridges were getting worse. More than half said congestion had increased in the past five years. And 60 percent said transportation systems were important to the economy.

But in addition to opposing a gas-tax increase, the survey found that the public doesn't support several of the other options on the table. By more than 2 to 1, respondents said they were against private-public partnerships like the one that built Virginia's High Occupancy Toll lanes because private investors have the right to charge tolls.

Just 20 percent said they fa-

vored revolutionizing the system to charge drivers for each mile they travel, while 40 percent said they were against that.

Shifting more responsibility for taxation and project selection to state and local governments — an approach favored by some Republicans — won support from just 30 percent of those surveyed.

"No one should be surprised by a poll finding people aren't willing to pay more for something they're already getting at a big discount," said Brian P. McGuire, president of Associated Equipment Distributors. "My read is that Americans understand the benefits of infrastructure but don't understand how it's paid for. We can either do that the responsible way — raising the gas tax or creating other new user-fee revenues — or we can continue to pass the buck to our kids and grandkids."

A regular reference in discussions of transportation funding is Alaska's infamous "bridge to nowhere."

Experts say many people think that without "fraud, waste and abuse," another frequently used phrase, transportation dollars would stretch further.

"The bridge to nowhere has affected federal transportation funding," said Pete Ruane, president of the American Road & Transportation Builders Association. "But when it comes to referendums on the local and state level, 73 percent of projects have been approved. People don't see them as sending their money down a rathole."

Ruane said too many on Capitol Hill were "poll-iticians" rather than politicians.

"That's not leadership," he said.

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**MYTH: Torture is a partisan issue.**  
**FACT: Opposition to torture is bipartisan.**

President Reagan called torture "an abhorrent practice," and in 1988 he signed the international treaty prohibiting it. When the U.S. government began using torture after 9/11, there was a bipartisan outcry.

In fact, many of the strongest critics of the torture program—Senator John McCain, Senator John Warner, former Navy General Counsel Alberto Mora, former Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage—are lifelong Republicans.

In December 2009 a bipartisan majority of the Senate Intelligence Committee approved the landmark report on CIA torture, and in April 2014 a bipartisan majority voted to declassify key sections of it.

Torture isn't a Republican or Democratic issue: it's a frontal assault on American ideals.

# THE TRUTH ON TORTURE IS COMING

CONGRESS NEEDS TO MAKE SURE THAT TORTURE IS OFF THE TABLE—FOR GOOD.

[humanrightsfirst.org/torturetruth](http://humanrightsfirst.org/torturetruth)



human rights first

American ideals. Universal values.