

Nov 04, 2016 by [Mark Dillen](#)

Pay to Play ^[1]

As the slots get filled for new U.S. ambassadors, I have to modify my earlier praise: too many sensitive overseas posts are being given to Obama fundraisers. For every Carlos Pascual (veteran envoy now assigned to Mexico), there now appear to be several David Jacobsons (Illinois lawyer and Obama-Biden fundraiser set to go to Canada). South Africa, for example, falls into the latter category: an important country in which the next U.S. Ambassador will be known first as a contributor/fundraiser (ambassador-designate Donald Gips reportedly raised \$500,000 for Obama's campaign). Ditto for Belgium and Switzerland. Paris (Charles Rivkin) and London (Louis Susman) nominees, announced earlier, fell into a kind of gray area — fundraisers, yes, but with a lot of international expertise.

Politico's Ted Johnson notes that "even the most unlikely of appointees can make their mark." However, the patronage game of appointments as reward for campaign contributions makes the odds of this happening rather long. Wealthy campaign contributors seldom have input into policy issues during the campaign — their expertise lies elsewhere. Patronage turns out to be the likely course, one followed by every administration, Republican and Democratic, and the transparent reason for many otherwise inexplicable choices.

Johnson quotes Bruce Gelb, George H.W. Bush's chief fundraiser, as pleading that fundraisers deserve more respect — they are "committed, dedicated, usually bright, successful people." But Gelb's own tenure as 41's director of USIA was so lackluster that it undercuts his argument. The more that appointments are influenced by the amount of money that one has raised, the more that appointee's credibility suffers.

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