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## The Defense Industry's Surprising 2016 Favorites: Bernie & Hillary

*Both Sanders and Clinton have received more money from defense contractors than any GOP candidate.*

by Alexander Cohen



Democratic presidential front-runner Hillary Clinton has collected more money than any other candidate in the 2016 race from employees tied to the 50 largest contractors with the Department of Defense — at least \$454,994 in campaign funds over a 14-month period ending in February.

While Clinton's haul is substantial, it is only one-third higher than the amount defense contractors gave to the campaign of Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, Clinton's rival for the Democratic nomination. Despite advocating steep cuts in defense spending, Sanders' campaign

has accepted at least \$310,055 in defense-related donations — more than any Republican presidential candidate — since the start of the 2016 campaign cycle.

According to the Center for Public Integrity's review of Federal Election Commission data, over a 14-month time period from January 2015 through February 2016, the Clinton and Sanders campaigns together received at least \$765,049 from employees of major defense contractors — more than twice the \$357,775 sum received by the Republican Party's three remaining presidential candidates. Among the current GOP contenders, Texas Senator Ted Cruz, who has called for large increases in defense spending, won the lion's share of defense industry donations, receiving \$307,955.

The disparity between the Democratic and Republican candidates may seem unusual, since Republicans often depict themselves as more supportive of defense spending than their Democratic opponents, and historically, more defense-related contributions have gone to Republicans. It's possible that donors at defense-related companies are betting that a Democrat is more likely to win the White House in the fall than any of the Republicans, which makes Clinton and Sanders more useful targets for investment. The donations may also reflect the fact that the Democratic Party's highest elected official, President Barack Obama, has called for a \$2.4 billion increase in defense spending for fiscal year 2017, and many Democratic lawmakers have voiced support for Obama's request even though [polls show the proposal lacks public support](#).

### **GE loves Clinton**

The Center for Public Integrity examined contribution data filed with the Federal Election Commission for 22 current and former candidates for president, and compiled a list of the top 50 defense contractors using data released by the General Services Administration for [fiscal year 2013](#).

The data show that Clinton's largest batch of defense-related contributions — at least \$56,478 — came from employees of General Electric. The Connecticut-based behemoth, which manufactures [engines](#) for many of the military's fighter aircraft, received DOD contracts totaling \$2.3 billion and \$2.2 billion in fiscal years 2013 and 2014, respectively. When asked to comment about the campaign donations, a spokesperson for GE emailed back a response. "G.E. is not backing a presidential candidate. Our employees make their campaign donation decisions individually."

Workers with Chicago-based aerospace giant Boeing collectively gave Clinton's campaign at least \$34,545. Boeing builds fighter jets, helicopters, radar systems and works on the military's nuclear missiles. Employees of Lockheed Martin, the Pentagon's largest contractor, gave Clinton at least \$28,623. Lockheed Martin is a contractor for numerous defense programs, including the troubled F-35 fighter jet, the most expensive weapons system ever built.

From 2003–2008, New York Senator Clinton served on the Senate Armed Services Committee. During that time, her campaign and leadership PAC collected a combined \$215,801 in contributions from the defense industry, including \$103,850 from contractor PACs. GE was also

her top contributor among the contractors during that period, giving her \$24,070, according to an analysis of data from the Center for Responsive Politics.

Corporations, including defense contractors, are banned from giving money directly to candidates. But they can direct spending toward particular candidates by company-run political action committees that receive donations from their employees. They are also free to donate funds to so-called super PACs, outside spending groups made possible by a 2010 Supreme Court decision. Although defense contractors rarely give money to super PACs, they have made such contributions in the 2016 race, including \$3,315 given to three pro-Cruz super PACs, and \$75,000 that a super PAC supporting South Carolina Senator Lindsey Graham received from Boeing's PAC and from a GE manager.

### **Pro-defense posture**

Clinton hasn't laid out a clear position on defense spending, and her campaign did not respond to several requests for comment. [On her campaign website](#), she has argued for "permanently ending the damaging sequester" — meaning she supports rolling back [budget caps](#) that tried to curtail the federal deficit by limiting how much government agencies, including DOD, can spend.

[During a speech she gave to the Brookings Institution](#) in September 2015, Clinton said she supports selling Israel the trillion-dollar F-35 aircraft. She has said little about nuclear modernization plans, though she has [said](#) the possible \$1 trillion price tag associated with such plans “doesn't make sense.” Later, when asked if she would oppose spending that amount on new nuclear weapons, she said she was “going to look into that.”

Sanders has taken a different approach. While he has supported the F-35 program, which is slated to station planes in his home state, he is a co-sponsor of the [Smarter Approach to Nuclear Expenditures Act](#), which calls for cutting \$100 billion from planned U.S. spending on nuclear weapons over the next decade.

“We need a strong military, it is a dangerous world. But I think we can make judicious cuts,” Sanders [told](#) a U.S. Student Association town meeting at the University of Iowa in February 2015. “There is massive fraud going on in the defense industry,” he added, and “virtually every major defense contractor has either been convicted of fraud or reached a settlement with the government.” On January 17, during the fourth Democratic debate, Sanders said DOD's priorities need “fundamental change.”

Nevertheless, Sanders collected at least \$310,055 from defense contractor employees, including at least \$45,652 from employees of Boeing and at least \$36,624 from employees of Lockheed Martin — more than Clinton received from either group. Two-thirds of Sanders' total and 95 percent of his individual contributions from the defense industry came in amounts of \$250 or less, while Clinton was more reliant on contributions of at least \$1,000, including many from company managers. Neither Sanders' campaign nor Boeing responded to requests for comment.

## Cruz stands out among Republicans

During CNN's Republican presidential town hall on February 18, Cruz [said](#) Obama has "weakened and degraded the military," and that if elected, Cruz would aim to raise defense spending to 4 percent of the country's gross domestic product — a spending increase of roughly \$135 billion beyond what Obama has proposed. Cruz's [plan](#) would increase the number of active-duty troops, add more fighter aircraft and build more ships for the Navy.

Cruz's top defense-related donor was Lockheed Martin, whose employees gave him at least \$44,958, more than they've given to any other presidential candidate. Lockheed Martin, which declined to comment for this story, is a contractor for the Aegis Combat System and was the Missile Defense Agency's top contractor in fiscal year 2014, receiving about \$1.8 billion, almost one-third of the agency's awarded spending that year, according to the [most recent information available from the General Services Administration](#). The Cruz campaign did not respond to a request for comment.

Coming in second among the remaining Republicans was Ohio Governor John Kasich, who has received at least \$39,194 from donors associated with the top defense contractors. At the outset of his campaign, Kasich highlighted his efforts as a congressman 20 years earlier to cut Pentagon spending, [saying](#) "we made things right. We saved money. We improved the system." In October, as part of his "[Action Plan](#)" for balancing the federal budget, he called for freezing funds that can be spent for nondefense programs, while adding \$102 billion in new Pentagon spending.

Among the three remaining Republican presidential candidates, Donald Trump has received the least in identified contributions from contractor employees: just \$10,586 (Trump is largely self-funding his campaign, a factor that probably influenced this outcome). His position on defense spending isn't clear, and when asked to weigh in about specific weapons issues, he has not given definitive answers. But Trump has been clear in his demands that countries where U.S. troops are deployed, including Saudi Arabia and Japan, pay an increased share of the costs for their defense. "When you look at the kind of money that our country is losing, we can't afford to do this," Trump told the *Washington Post* editorial board in an interview on March 21.

The amounts given by GE, Lockheed and Boeing employees to presidential candidates from early 2015 to February 2016 are smaller than what employees of those same companies gave over a comparable period before the 2008 presidential election, the last presidential race without an incumbent.

Some suggest the reduction is the natural outcome of primaries that have been too hard to predict. "It's so confusing this year; they [the contractors] don't know who to give to, especially on the Republican side," says [Barry Blechman](#), a fellow at the nonpartisan Stimson Center. This leaves open the possibility that defense-related campaign donations could ramp up quickly once the party's choices become clearer.

For now, though, defense contractors are donating more to members of Congress who sit on key defense-related committees. From the beginning of 2015 through February 2016, PACs overseen by the top 50 defense contractors have donated about \$7.5 million to the campaigns and

leadership PACs of those members of the current Congress who have served on the Armed Services committees and the Appropriations subcommittees for Defense and for Energy and Water — elected officials who, through controlling appropriations and authorizing bills, have an arguably larger impact than the administration on the fate of specific weapons programs.

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