

Jeffrey Epstein donated to several Democrats throughout 1990s and early 2000s

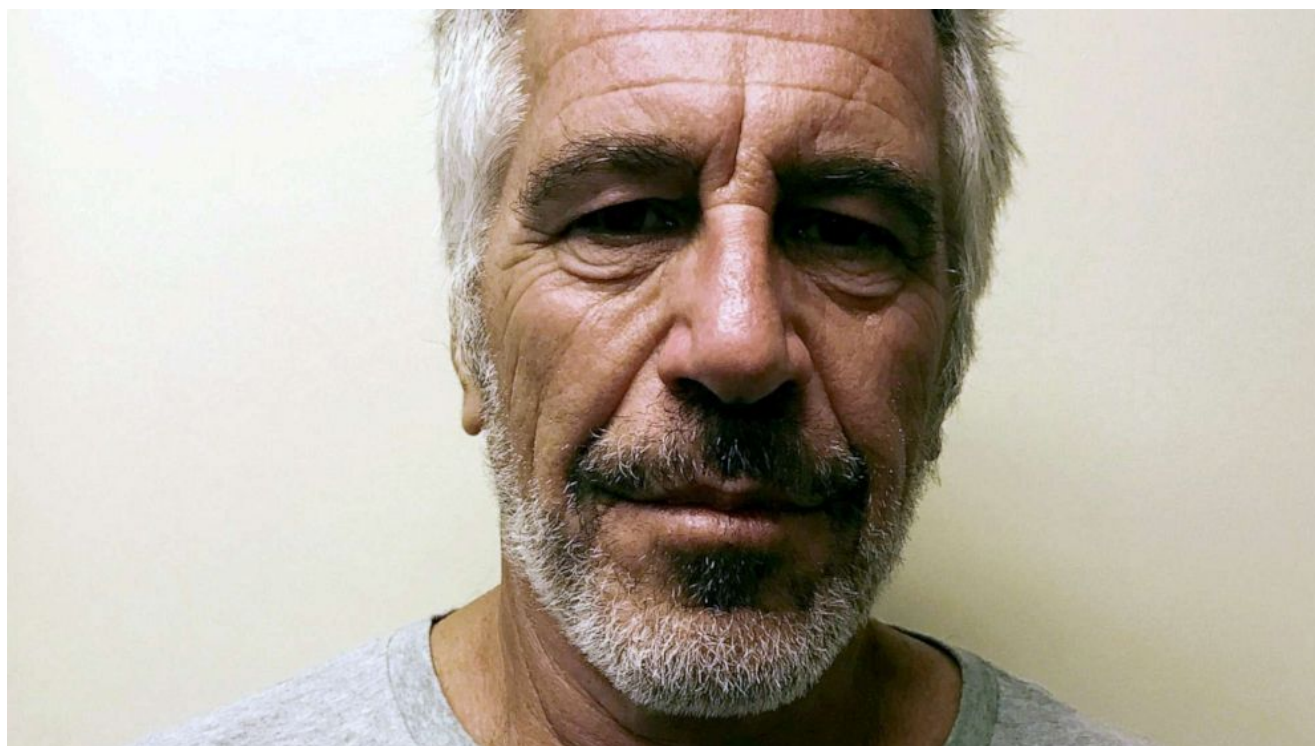
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Soo Rin Kim

The decades-old donations raise questions about handling matters years later.

By Soo Rin Kim

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U.S. financier Jeffrey Epstein appears in a photograph taken for the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services' sex offender registry, March 28, 2017, and obtained by Reuters, July 10, 2019.

New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services via Reuters

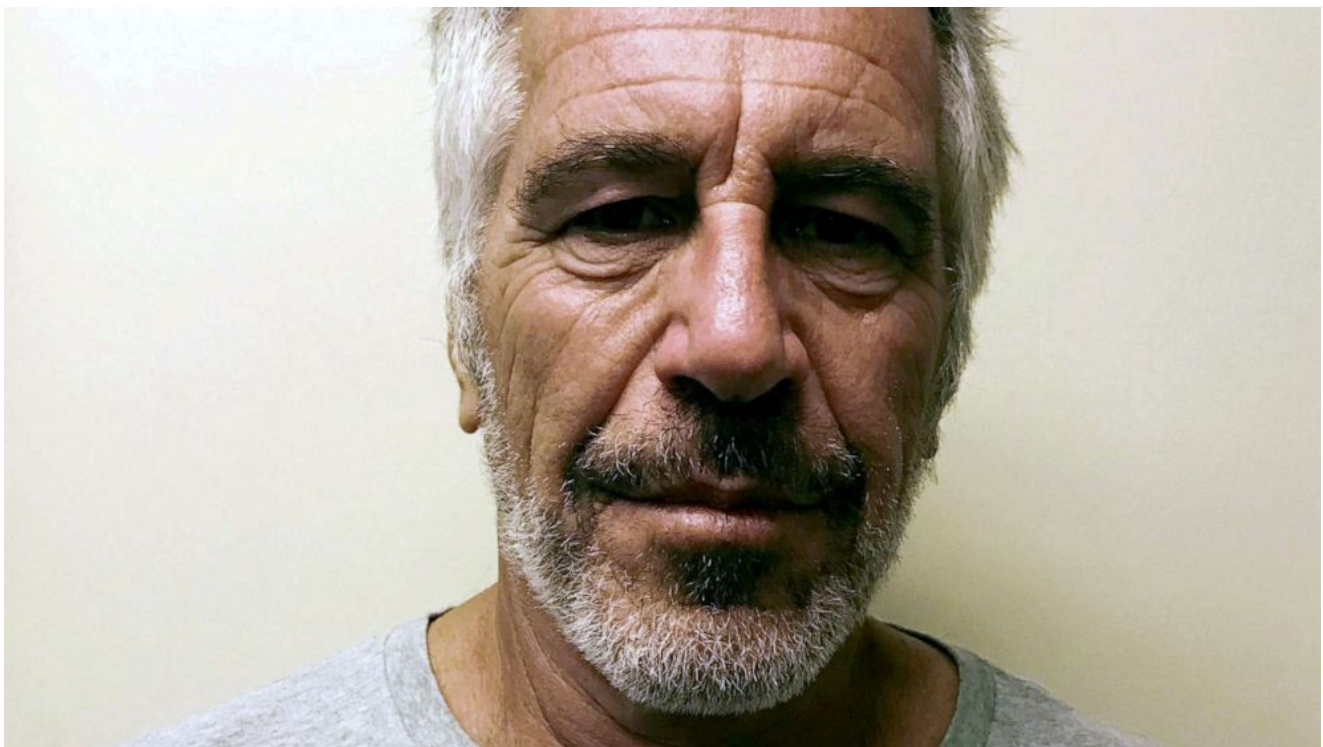
Jeffrey Epstein, a wealthy financier charged with sex trafficking, has been a prolific donor to various Democratic campaigns and party committees over the past couple decades, including contributions to some who are now calling for the resignation of a Trump cabinet member who cut a deal for Epstein in a similar case more than a decade earlier.

One of the biggest beneficiaries of Epstein's contributions was then-Senate hopeful Hillary Clinton, who received \$20,000 from him in 1999 through her joint fundraising committee with the Democratic Party, according to Federal Election Commission filings. Bill Clinton's presidential campaign also received \$1,000 from Epstein in 1992.

The Clintons, along with President Donald Trump, were among Epstein's vast network of high-profile rich and famous people who helped the former Wall Street insider turned private wealth manager rise to prominence in the early 2000s.

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U.S. financier Jeffrey Epstein appears in a photograph taken for the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services' sex offender registry, March 28, 2017, and obtained by Reuters, July 10, 2019.
New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services via Reuters

John Kerry, Hillary Clinton's successor as former President Barack Obama's secretary of state, also was a recipient of Epstein's donations during his time as a U.S. senator in Massachusetts in the 1990s and early 2000s.

Kerry's spokesperson told ABC News in a statement that Kerry hasn't had an active campaign account or political operation for more than a decade and did not know Epstein personally.

"Obviously, donations received in 1991 and 2002 were spent years before any of this came to light," Kerry's spokesperson said. "Back when he did have an active campaign, if donors were convicted of crimes, the campaign gave away those contributions to charity, and this small amount was likely given away in 2008."

"Epstein was just one of hundreds of thousands who gave to the campaigns, not someone in our orbit. Safe to say he's not in our Rolodex," the spokesperson added.

Similarly, Hillary Clinton's spokesperson, Nick Merrill, told ABC News that "JFC has been defunct for over a decade," and referred to the Democratic Party. ABC News has reached out to the DSCC.

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Bill Clinton, through his press secretary, released a statement when Epstein's indictment was unsealed on Monday, saying the former president "knows nothing about the terrible crimes Jeffrey Epstein pleaded guilty to in Florida some years ago, or those with which he has recently [been] charged in New York."

ABC News has reached out to representatives for Bill Clinton specifically about the donation, but they did not immediately respond.

The decades-old donations raise broader questions about how such contributions should be handled when, years later, the donor is ensnared in controversy.

Adav Noti, former assistant general counsel at Federal Election Commission and currently a senior director at Campaign Legal Center, told ABC News that it's become increasingly common for contributions that were uncontroversial when made to be questioned retroactively.

"Whether that's fair depends in part on the nature and amount of the contributions," Noti said. "So it's certainly fair to ask questions when the contributor is officially a major fundraiser for a national political party. ... It seems less fair in the case of a one-off contribution or someone who didn't have any meaningful personal interaction with the candidate or party."

Epstein appeared in court Monday afternoon following his sudden arrest over the weekend, and pleaded not guilty to charges from the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York that he, from about 2002 to 2005, "sexually exploited and abused dozens of minor girls at his homes in Manhattan, New York, and Palm Beach, Florida, among other locations."

Since then, two current lawmakers have also announced they will be donating the equivalent of past donations.



Former President Bill Clinton speaks during the Robert F. Kennedy memorial service at Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia, June 6, 2018.
Michael Reynolds/EPA via Shutterstock, FILE

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., who had received about \$22,000 from Epstein through his House and Senate campaigns and other affiliated joint fundraising committees between 1992 and 1999, announced that his campaign will be donating the same amount he received from Epstein to "anti-sex trafficking and anti-violence against women groups." Schumer also gave away his past donations from Harvey Weinstein.

"While these campaign accounts closed about 20 years ago, and even then the campaign never controlled the two political action committees (PACs), Senator Schumer is donating an equal sum to anti-sex trafficking and anti-violence against women groups," Schumer's spokesperson Justin Goodman told ABC News in a statement.

On Tuesday, the New York senator called for the resignation of Labor Secretary Alex Acosta, who had cut a plea deal for Epstein in similar charges more than a decade ago.

"If he refuses to resign, President Trump should fire him," Schumer said.

(MORE: Acosta defends his role in Epstein plea deal, offers no apology to victims)

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Virgin Islands House Delegate Stacey Plaskett, who received a total of \$8,100 from Epstein in the 2016 and 2018 cycles, on Wednesday announced she will be donating the same amount to Virgin Islands organizations that work with women and children, and called for other elected officials in the Virgin Islands to return any donations from Epstein.

"I want it to be clear that I in no way support the allegations and have confidence in the Southern District of New York to investigate and prosecute the matter," Plaskett said in a statement.

This isn't the first time politicians have backtracked on Epstein's money.

A spokesperson for Clinton's former Energy Secretary Bill Richardson confirmed to ABC News that Richardson received \$50,000 from Epstein during his gubernatorial reelection campaign in New Mexico in 2006. The spokesperson told ABC News that Richardson donated the same amount to local charities when Epstein was first charged more than a decade ago and has not received any donations from Epstein since.



Senate Minority Leader Sen. Chuck Schumer of N.Y., center, speaks to reporters following the weekly policy luncheon on Capitol Hill in Washington, July 9, 2019.

Susan Walsh/AP

Just last year, Epstein gave \$10,000 to the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee but the party committee returned the donation just days later.

"Without second thought, the DCCC immediately refunded this unsolicited donation," DCCC spokesperson told ABC News.

Epstein, in the 1990s through early 2000s, also gave to various now former lawmakers and politician's campaigns, including former senator from Connecticut and vice president nominee Joe Lieberman and former Rep. Rick Lazio, R-N.Y., who ran unsuccessfully against Hillary Clinton for Senate in 2000.

ABC News has reached out to Lieberman.

Lazio told ABC News in a statement that the campaign accounts he received Epstein's donation through were closed many years ago and have no information or recollection of the donation beyond what is in the FEC database.

"I have been out of office for over 18 years and have no direct or indirect control over a campaign account," Lazio said. "... I believe that the purpose of a return of a contribution is that it then won't be used to further a political campaign. That would be irrelevant for me."

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