

NEWS

Health companies gave generously to President Trump's inauguration

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Facing acute risks to their businesses from Washington, D.C., policymakers, health companies spent more than \$2 million to buy access to the incoming Trump administration via candlelight dinners, black-tie balls and other U.S. presidential inauguration events, new filings show.

Drugmaker Pfizer gave \$1 million to help finance the inauguration, according to **documents filed** with the U.S. Federal Election Commission. Amgen, another pharmaceutical company, donated \$500,000. Health insurers Anthem, Centene and Aetna all gave six-figure contributions.

They joined a surge of corporate donors from multiple industries to break inauguration-finance records even as then-President-elect Donald Trump promised to “drain the swamp” of Washington influence-peddling.

But the stakes for the health industry were especially high as the new administration prepared to take power.

Two weeks before Pfizer's donation, Trump **told *Time* magazine**, “I'm going to bring down drug prices.” At the same time, one of his top goals was repealing Obamacare — the Affordable Care Act — and its billions in subsidies for insurance companies and hospitals.

Also writing checks for the inauguration were drugmaker Abbott Laboratories, drug wholesaler Caremark, insurer MetLife and Managed Care of North America, a dental benefits manager.

Trump's inaugural committee raised \$107 million, more than twice as much as for any previous presidential investiture. President Barack Obama's 2009 inauguration held the previous record of \$53 million.

Obama banned corporate donations that year and limited individual donations to \$50,000 but accepted corporate grants for his 2013 inauguration.

Intimate dinner:

No health company gave more to Trump's event than Pfizer, whose profits for Lyrica, Prevnar 13 and other high-priced medicines could come under pressure if the Medicare program for seniors is allowed to negotiate on cost, as Trump has suggested.

Lyrica alleviates nerve and muscle pain. Prevnar 13 is a vaccine against pneumococcal pneumonia.

Along with several other pharmaceutical companies, Pfizer is the **subject of a Justice Department** investigation over donations to charities that help Medicare patients avoid copayments for expensive drugs.

Pfizer CEO Ian Read is also a vocal **advocate of cutting corporate income taxes**, which Trump **has pledged to do**. The Obama administration thwarted Pfizer's \$160 billion deal to move its legal residency to low-tax Ireland to merge with **Botox maker Allergan**.

Pfizer's \$1 million donation entitled it to four tickets to a "leadership luncheon" with "select Cabinet appointees and House and Senate leadership," according to a **solicitation brochure** obtained and posted online by the Center for Public Integrity.

"As it has been the case with previous presidential inaugurations, we made a financial contribution to the 58th Presidential Inaugural Committee, and a group of our senior leaders participated in various official events," says Pfizer spokesperson Sharon Castillo. She declined to identify the executives.

Amgen's inauguration gift of \$500,000 was the second-biggest from a healthcare donor. The company makes Enbrel for arthritis and Epogen for anemia, among other drugs.

Amgen's contribution bought it two tickets to "an intimate dinner" with then-Vice President-elect Mike Pence and his wife, Karen Pence. Amgen CEO Robert Bradway was among **seven pharma executives** who met with Trump in the White House on 31 January, although that wasn't part of the inauguration package.

Amgen spokesperson Kelley Davenport declined to comment beyond describing the company as joining "numerous other donors from a diverse group of industries and individuals" supporting the event.

High stakes:

Pfizer also got entrée to the Pence inaugural dinner. Both companies had access to balls, receptions, luncheons, concerts and other events available to lesser donors.

Neither Pfizer, Amgen nor other large healthcare donors to Trump's inauguration made contributions to Obama's 2013 inauguration, which did accept corporate money. Pfizer gave \$250,000 to President George W. Bush's 2005 inauguration.

The biggest healthcare corporate donor to Obama's 2013 investiture was drugmaker Genentech, which gave \$750,000, records show. The company did not contribute to Trump's inauguration. "Prior to the 2016 election, we made a decision not to sponsor any inaugural activities for the foreseeable future," says Genentech spokesperson Susan Willson.

Contributors to this year's event also included insurer Anthem, one of the largest participants in the Affordable Care Act's online marketplaces, and Centene, which also sells insurance plans through the online exchanges. Anthem gave \$100,000 and Centene gave \$250,000.

Both companies' marketplace businesses depend on generous federal subsidies that would be jeopardized by an Affordable Care Act repeal or other actions by the administration. Anthem has pressed the administration to preserve the subsidies and **tighten rules** for marketplace enrollment.

Anthem Chief Executive Officer Joseph Swedish was one of a group of insurance executives who **met with Trump in February**. Swedish met again with Trump in the White House last month, *Modern Healthcare* reported.

Centene, which manages state and federal Medicaid programs for low-income people in many states, also benefited from the Affordable Care Act's Medicaid expansion. Analysts see the company as **especially vulnerable** to a potential repeal of Obama's health law.

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