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PRIVATE PRISON COMPANIES, WHO GAVE ILLEGAL DONATIONS TO PRESIDENT-ELECT TRUMP, SEE STOCKS SPIKE WHEN TRUMP ANNOUNCED AS PRESIDENT

New report from Free Speech For People highlights the link between campaign donations from the private prison companies and prison guard unions and new laws that favor private prisons

UNITED STATES – According to a report released today by *Free Speech for People*, a nonpartisan nonprofit, private prison companies and prison guard unions have spent millions to lobby and elect both Democrats and Republicans into office. This includes funds donated to president-elect Trump that apparently violated campaign finance laws, and funds given to Democratic Governor Jerry Brown. The report follows the money to see what these candidates support when it comes to issues related to immigration reform. The report discovered that Governor Brown, one of the only democrats to receive donations from private prison companies and prison guard unions, used his power to veto the “Dignity Not Detention Act,” which had overwhelming support with state legislatures. It also found that if Trump keeps to his words, there will be millions of undocumented people held in immigration detention centers while they wait for court deportation proceedings, driving up private prison stock value. Both decisions are profitable to private prison companies, and neither provides solutions for immigration reform.

President-elect Donald Trump announced he will begin deporting anywhere between [2 to 3 million](#) undocumented people within his first 100 days in office. Many of these undocumented people will be [held in immigration detention centers](#) while they await deportation court proceedings. As a result, private prison companies - which run most immigration detention centers in the United States - saw their [stock spike](#), going up 40 percent and 16 percent the night it was announced that Trump had won the presidency.

Private prison companies gave more than \$150,000 to [Trump’s campaign](#). This include a \$100,000 payment that apparently [violated campaign finance laws](#); the contribution was made while private prison companies were negotiating with the Department of Justice on whether to continue using private prisons on a federal level.

Most undocumented immigrants who are detained—including refugees and asylum seekers awaiting processing—are held in privately-run, for-profit prisons known as “immigration detention centers.” Corrections Corporation of America, which recently changed its name to the “CoreCivic,” and the GEO Group, Inc. are two of the largest private prison companies in the United States. Together, they run [90 percent](#) of the immigration detention centers. These private prisons currently hold [33,000](#) immigrants, refugees, and human-trafficking victims per day. That number is expected to increase if Trump keeps true to his word on deporting 2-3 million undocumented people.

This system is [expensive](#), harmful and has generated resistance. Beyond the many immigrant detainees leading multiple [hunger strikes](#), families, activists, and the majority of the public are all calling for change. While some aspects of immigration policy are politically controversial, a decade's worth of [polling](#) shows that a consistent 65 percent of U.S. adults favor a pathway to citizenship for undocumented people.

Between 2000 to 2012, GEO and CoreCivic (along with another small company) have spent more than [\\$32 million](#) on campaign contributions and lobbying for the federal level alone. In 2014, CoreCivic and GEO spent well over \$3 million lobbying Congress and more than \$500,000 on federal campaign contributions. These numbers only reflect disclosed contributions; we have no way to know how much these private prison companies have spent in hidden donations, otherwise known as "[secret money](#)." In California, GEO donated over [\\$25,000](#) to Governor Brown in 2010 and over [\\$50,000](#) in 2014, while CoreCivic donated over [\\$60,000](#) to Brown's campaign in 2012. Governor Brown's re-election campaign also received over [\\$2 million from the prison guards' union](#).

The power of wealthy interest groups is highlighted by an example from just a few months ago in California. The State Assembly and Senate [overwhelmingly voted in favor](#) of the "[Dignity not Detention](#)" act, a measure that would prohibit cities, counties, and local law enforcement from contracting with private prisons in civil immigration proceedings. This bill was introduced as a direct response to troubling reports of [distressing detention conditions](#) in California-based private detention centers, including [medical neglect and mishandled sexual abuse allegations](#). However, since 2010, California Governor Jerry Brown has been receiving campaign contributions [from private prisons](#) and the [prison guards' union](#). Brown [vetoed](#) the "Dignity not Detention" act, protecting the interests of these groups.

These examples highlight one of the biggest roadblocks in American democracy - money in politics. The Supreme Court's decisions in [Citizens United v. FEC](#) ruled that money should have "free speech" protections under the Constitution, meaning wealthy people (and now, since *Citizens United*, corporations and unions) can spend unlimited amounts of money in politics. [Studies show](#) that middle and low income voters have virtually no effect on the policies Congress recently enacted. Instead, Congress listens to those with the most money to spend on their elections. This has left us with a nation that is now run by, and largely for, the wealthy few.

"Overturning *Citizens United* won't fix our immigration policy, or the detention system, overnight. But when we're up against the wealth and political might of the private prison industry, we need the voices of the people to rise above the wallets of the wealthy." Says Jasmine Gomez, co-author of the report and the 2016-18 Democracy Honors Fellow at *Free Speech For People*.

The full report is available [here](#). Jasmine Gomez is available for interview upon request.