



Robert W. Wood

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When Churches Buy Gulfstreams, Thank The Clinton Foundation

With all the coverage of Hillary Clinton and the Clinton Foundation, it is easy to ignore other charities that push the envelope. The charity as business titan model may be reshaping the world, and it isn't only the cash-rich-friends-of-Clintons-favored foundation that is doing it. Take travel.

An Atlanta-based minister claimed he needed a \$65 million private jet so he could "safely and swiftly share the Good News of the Gospel worldwide." This sounds preposterous, and it gets worse. Pastor Creflo Dollar asked 200,000 of his followers to donate \$300 a piece. That would total \$60 million, so perhaps the extra \$5 million was coming from church coffers? The controversial request generated some outrage and the online tithing request was removed from the website.

No matter, he has his money, [and Pastor Creflo Dollar will get his \\$65 million jet](#). World Changers Church International, a/k/a Creflo Dollar Ministries, [announced](#) it is ready to buy a Gulfstream G650. That isn't just *any* jet. It called the megajet "a reflection of the level of excellence at which this organization chooses to operate." World Changers Church International [said](#), "A long-range, high-speed, intercontinental jet aircraft is a tool that is necessary in order to fulfill the mission of the ministry."



It does not appear that the Clinton Foundation has sprung for its own jet yet, although [Hillary Clinton has certainly faced scrutiny for her use of private jets](#). The travel budget is huge, causing some to wonder if it—along with many other things—means private benefits for the Clintons. In a very real sense, [the Clinton 'charity' begins at home](#), and private inurement is a no-no for charities. There are various other problems too. Some have claimed that [the Clinton Foundation only spent 10 percent on charity according to the organization's own tax filings](#), claims the foundation vigorously denies.

In all, the Clinton Foundation has been roiled by controversy. Tax returns omitted tens of millions in ethically challenged foreign contributions. From high administrative and travel costs for the Clinton family, to sweetheart media coverage. Sometimes others end up looking bad, like George Stephanopoulos forgetting to mention his own contributions while grilling others about theirs. Sometimes her denials sound a little like her husband's famous line, 'I did not have sexual relations with that woman.'

She says none of this influenced her job as Secretary of State. Just look at her emails. Oh, those were just personal and were deleted. She only used that personal email server so she could carry one device. It was just about convenience. What, Mrs. Clinton had four devices? Oops. She resigned from the Foundation's board after she officially announced her Presidential run. And the past is the past. As she famously said, what difference would it make?

Upon becoming Secretary of State, Mrs. Clinton promised that the Foundation would stop accepting donations from foreign governments. Oops. The acting CEO of the Foundation, [posted a statement](#) acknowledging the tax errors. Extensive donations by foreign governments while Mrs. Clinton was Secretary of State are hard to explain. Keeping embarrassing and conflict-triggering gifts quiet is harder still. The Foundation downplayed the errors, noting that the dollars from government sources were noted in the organization's annual audited financial reports posted on its website. Not true, it turned out.

There was an ethics agreement signed with the Obama administration in 2008 to limit such contributions. House Republicans formally asked the IRS to review whether the Clinton Foundation is complying with the rules governing its tax-exempt status. The letter was signed by Marsha Blackburn and 51 other House Republicans, and comes on the heels of a flurry of reports and speculation about the Foundation's international fundraising. Blackburn asked the IRS to respond within 30 days.

But will the IRS take any action? It hardly seems likely. Lois Lerner ran the tax exempt organizations wing of the IRS, but she evidently focused on what she thought were bad conservative causes. The Clinton Foundation seems inextricably entwined with politics and speech-making. Don't worry, we were told, the Foundation will amend many years of its taxes. That announcement came only after it was reported that the Foundation had gross errors in its filings.

It failed to separately disclose the millions of dollars in government funding it received during Mrs. Clinton's State Department—private email—years. Of course, those private emails were just for convenience. An operative banned from the State Department, [Sidney Blumenthal](#), is just an old friend, so Mrs. Clinton used yet another private email account. Even if there wasn't any sleight of hand, it sure looks bad. Perhaps it is no wonder that many other charities seem to be going for the gusto too.

For alerts to me at Wood@WoodLLP.com. This discussion is not intended as legal advice, and cannot be relied upon for any purpose without the services of a qualified professional.