Information Table and Analysis

**Defense Related Contributions to Selected Presidential Candidates**

(Ranked by Total Contributions)

Data in Table Mostly From OpenSecrets.org

Analysis by Winslow T. Wheeler

You are invited to review the table on the first two pages and consider the analysis below; note that there are important caveats and explanations.

| Candidate | Total Contributions, including “Outside Groups” | Five major DOD contractors (Northrop-Grumman: NG,Lockheed-Martin: LM,General Dynamics: GD,Raytheon & Boeing) plus total reported “Defense Sector” (i.e. defense industry) contributions  | DOD Components:US Army,US Air Force, US Navy, &DOD | All Reported Defense-related Contributions |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Bernie Sanders | $73,799,034($1,881 from Outside Groups) | N-G: $26,264L-M: $26,537GD: $20,024Raytheon: $16,603Boeing: $52,059Defense Sector Total: $172,803 | USA: $66,001USAF: $56,515USN: $60,271DOD: $54,032Tot. $236,819 | $409,622 |
| Donald Trump | $184,910,031($19,238,842 from Outside Groups) | N-G: $5,895L-M: $11,920GD: $7,729Raytheon: $9,053Boeing: $20,447Defense Sector Total: $148,218 | USA: $27,263USAF: $14,714USN: $17,403DOD: $33,367Tot. $92,747 | $240,965 |
| Pete Buttigieg | $50,936,509($0 from Outside Groups) | N-G: $11,758L-M: $6,218GD: $5,021Raytheon: $17,837Boeing: $18,528Defense Sector Total: $88,494 | USA:$28,837USAF:$21,818USN:$28,254DOD:$31,097$110,006 | $198,500 |
| Elizabeth Warren | $60,049,476($0 from Outside Groups) | N-G: $12,835L-M: $8,602GD: $8,641Raytheon: $11,459Boeing $26,131Defense Sector Total: $83,429 | USA: $22,314USAF: $20,522USN: $20,300DOD: $18,731Tot. $81,867 | $165,296 |
| Andrew Yang | $15,020,173($0 from Outside Groups) | N-G: $6,444L-M $3,716GD: $2,133Raytheon: $3,689Boeing: $8,012Defense Sector Total: $39,171 | USA:$15,425USAF:$12,549USN:$12,756DOD:$17,239$57,879 | $97,050 |
| Joe Biden | $36,760,280($0 from Outside Groups) | N-G: $7,517L-M: $13,403GD: $1,005Raytheon: $6,270Boeing: $9,433Defense Sector Total: $49,540 | USA:$19,396USAF:$7,086USN:$6,641DOD:$24,333$35,538 | $85,078 |
| Tulsi Gabbard | $9,003,179($0 from Outside Groups) | N-G: $801L-M $1,439GD: $4,664Raytheon: $2,636Boeing: $10,339Defense Sector Total: $16,988 | USA:$14,222USAF:$6,629USN:$6,532DOD:$4,254$31,637 | $48,625 |
| Amy Klobuchar | $17,389,552($0 from Groups Outside) | N-G: $1,035L-M: $2,201GD: $802Raytheon: $1,645Boeing: $6,101Defense Sector Total: $12,111 | USA:$3,924USAF:$1,041USN:$5,853DOD:$2,660$13,478 | $25,589 |
| Cory Booker | $19,330,607($1,125,105 from Outside Groups) | N-G: $321L-M: $1,769GD: $592Raytheon: $858Boeing: $2,032Defense Sector Total: $8,914 | USA:$2,964USAF:$2,464USN:$1,030DOD:$3,249$9,707 | $18,621 |

Analysis:

In total defense-related contributions for the 2020 presidential campaign, per data available at OpenSecrets.org in the first week of December 2019, Senator Bernie Sanders has out-collected all other candidates.

* He out collected Donald Trump: $409,622 to $240,965 ($168,657 or 70% more) on total defense related contributions; the margin has grown slightly from data collected in October and November.
* For contributions just from defense contractors, Sanders out collected Trump $172,803 to $148,218 (17% more); this margin is also growing from data collected earlier.
* Among the five defense corporations shown, Sanders out-collected Trump by multiples. Sanders’ collections from Lockheed-Martin and Boeing more than doubled Trump’s, and his intake from General Dynamics was almost threefold that of Trump. His contributions from Northrop-Grumman about quintupled Trump’s.
* Sanders also out-collected all of his Democratic rivals in total defense-related contributions, contributions from the defense industry sector, and the individual defense contractors shown in the table, except for one, Raytheon, which gave 8% more to Mayor Pete Buttigieg.
* In fact, for total defense-related contributions, Sanders out-collected his Democratic rivals by multiples: roughly twice what Pete Buttigieg and Elizabeth Warren have collected, and more than three times what Joe Biden and Andrew Yang have collected. The rest of the field (Gabbard, Klobuchar and Booker) collected one-ninth or less. (Self-funded candidate Tom Steyer -- not on the table -- has collected no defense related contributions; no data are available for Mayor Bloomberg.)
* Unless he is receiving defense industry money under the table from ostensibly non-defense PACs or via “dark” money, Donald Trump is performing remarkably poorly vis-à-vis several Democratic contenders, not just Sanders. Low overall performer Joe Biden pulled in more from Lockheed-Martin; Elizabeth Warren pulled in more from General Dynamics and Boeing; Warren, Buttigieg, Yang and Biden drew more from Raytheon and Northrop Grumman.
* For someone polling as a front-runner, Joe Biden also performed poorly among defense contractors and ranks with Yang more than with the prime defense industry contribution collectors: Sanders, Trump, Warren and Buttigieg.

The implications for the relationship of defense industry contributors to Sanders and the others may, or may not be, everything you might assume. Defense industry PACs, and the corrupting influence they have with compliant politicians time and time again, are not the source of this money. While PAC money very much predominates in the recorded donations to Members of Congress in the 2020 OpenSecrets.org data, none of the presidential candidates – even Trump – have accepted any recorded defense industry PAC money. Instead, it all comes from what the OpenSecrets.org data show as “Individuals,” who are allowed to give only up to the federally allowed limit of $2,800 per election. Thus, the money shown from corporations like Lockheed Martin is from individual donors who specified an association with Lockheed-Martin in the electronic forms or paperwork associated with their contribution.

The data for Sanders may be illustrative. OpenSecrets.org informs me that it appears that Sanders, for example, has thousands of individual contributions from people who identified an affiliation with Boeing and Lockheed Martin; there appear no donations giving him the legal maximum, and most seem to be engineers, technicians and other non-management types.

Furthermore, Sanders has collected more contributions from Boeing than any other recorded federal politician and doubles the politicians in second and third place. And, the $52,059 he collected from Boeing about doubles what he received from his next highest defense industry contributors (Northrop-Grumman and Lockheed-Martin). A Google search of Boeing and Sanders reveals several articles in late 2018 discussing various charges by Sanders against Boeing management and in favor of union workers at Boeing. It is possible that Sanders unique performance in collecting Boeing-affiliated donations stems from this activity, especially if the union or unions affiliated with Boeing plants made Sanders’ activity especially well known and prompted membership to be individually supportive.

That hypothetical explanation, however, does not mean that the donations being from individuals strips the giving of collective influence and is no more than an expression of grassroots support unrelated to corporate interests. Indeed, OpenSecrets.org explains at its FAQ page that “our research over more than 20 years shows enough of a correlation between individuals’ contributions and their employers’ political interests that we feel comfortable with our methodology.” Moreover, if it is correct that union-member donations from Boeing-affiliated individuals explains some significant part of Sanders’ unique performance in collecting Boeing contributions, it would be the union, not the corporation, who might want to keep candidate Sanders reminded of their support and interests. Significantly, unions frequently lobby in favor of the defense products made in plants where they have representation; the F-35 is a good example.

Analysis from the Center for Public Integrity would also tend to support the view that these smaller individual contributors should not be discounted, taken collectively, as uninterested in wielding influence. Based on more than two decades of experience on Capitol Hill and meetings with uncounted scores of defense lobbyists, I can assure the reader that the defense industry and any other spending or program advocates will be happy to make the politician and his staff very much aware of any contributions affiliated with their company or program.

In the case of candidate Sanders, influence peddlers from lobbyist shops, defense corporations and the Pentagon have evidence he can be a receptive target of their ministrations: that he and Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT) were acquired as advocates of basing the Defense Department’s highly controversial F-35 at Burlington Vermont very surely has not gone unnoticed among them. Sanders describes himself as opposed to the F-35 but also receptive to the in-State economic benefits of the basing at Burlington.

No, lobbyists for programs beyond the F-35 will never be able to convince him or his staff to reverse on an issue like President Trump’s $1.7 trillion plan to replace the US nuclear triad of weapons and delivery systems, but perhaps they can convince him on the edges of some of the sub-issues: Perhaps to proceed with the new nuclear ballistic submarine and missile program, rather than to extend the life of the existing Trident program. Or, perhaps to eschew proposals to eliminate the ICBM leg of the Triad as several authors have already suggested. Each example is hypothetical, but the methodology is always clear to defense industry and military spending operatives: you must get access to have a chance to make your case; contributions help to do that. In that industry, victories for even minor programs are worth $billions. Contributions do not automatically buy obedience, but they do create the opportunity for the advocate to make his or her case in front of the selected audience. That is their Constitutional right without the money, but as a practical matter on Capitol Hill money enables access, and access pricks eardrums.

No one should consider Sanders unique in this regard. The same logic applies to the other candidates, especially those, like Warren, who has also been a critic of defense spending. Those face to face meetings can help soften the rough edges in the relationship. That she collected more from Boeing than Trump seems to indicate an interest in having a relationship among Boeing-affiliated individuals.

A common refrain from the 2020 Democratic presidential candidates is that they collect no “corporate PAC” money. In the case of the defense industry they have no need to; they get plenty from “individuals.” As one academic commented, by giving up any corporate PAC money, these candidates are basically “giving up the sleeves out of their vest.”

Another whole category of contributions shown in the table above is contributions from the Army, Air Force, Navy and Department of Defense. Significant amounts are involved, frequently more than the total from defense industry – except for Trump, Warren and Biden. Again, these are all “individual” contributions from both Pentagon civilians and uniformed personnel. The OpenSecrets.org data show some of the money involved as coming from individuals in specific DOD components, such as the Corps of Engineers, research organizations and military academies; however, those affiliations account for only a small fraction of the total money, and the vast majority only show an affiliation to the “US Army,” etc..

It may be a crude misapplication of the evidence, but if one were to assume these data were a makeshift surrogate for the popularity of the candidates among civilian and military Pentagon personnel (notwithstanding the various limitations on the participation of DOD personnel in elections), there are some interesting implications. Again, Bernie Sanders outperforms all others; Buttigieg is a very distant second; Trump lags in either third or fourth place (along with Warren), depending on the service: Yang outperforms Biden, and Gabbard outperforms Klobuchar and Booker.

If these data can serve as a crude surrogate of politicians’ popularity among DOD civilian and military personnel, it is a bad sign for Republicans. Despite the GOP at least matching, actually usually outperforming, the Democrats in past election cycles on the measure of these individual DOD-related contributions, for the 2019-2020 data (so far) the all Democratic candidates for both Congress and the presidency -- taken together -- grossly outperform the Republicans. In the Army, 76% of all contributions were to Democrats, in the Air Force 82%, in the Navy 87%, and from DOD 79%.

The emergence of these defense entities being significant contributors is relatively new. OpenSecrets.org data for the Army and Navy, for example, show these contributions starting to increase in the 2004 presidential election and increasing dramatically since then. In the Army, these contributions doubled in 2004 and redoubled again in 2008, where they have stayed. In the Air Force, these contributions have been growing dramatically in presidential elections since 1996. Pentagon affiliated individual donors have apparently become much more active politically; the engine of this increase is open to speculation, but it is possible that the extremely solicitous behavior of Congress toward the Pentagon and military service since 2001 has opened the door to a significantly greater involvement by DOD-related individuals in federal elections.

It is important to note that in every case, the proportion of defense-related contributions to the candidates’ total contributions from all sources is quite tiny – well below 1% in all cases. Nor are the various defense corporations the biggest donors.

* Trump has collected $millions from mostly obscure entities, including “G H Palmer Associates” ($6 million), “Las Vegas Sands” ($5 million), “Adelson Clinic for Drug Abuse Treatment & Research” ($5 million), and an “Irving Moscowitz Foundation” ($3 million). Plus, there are numerous others ranging from $3 million to $1 million listed.
* Sanders has collected over $100,000 each from Alphabet, Amazon and Microsoft, and over $200,000 from the University of California.
* Buttegieg has collected $184,00 from Alphabet and $105,000 from the University of California.
* Warren has collected over $200,00 from Alphabet and the University of California.
* Biden collected over $650,000 from just three apparent law firms.

Law firms, various universities, Alphabet, Amazon and Microsoft are frequently among the top donors of all of the candidates discussed here.

 The meaning of the top contributors to each candidate from the entities shown at the OpenSecrets.org website for the presidential candidates is not clear; it certainly could use some further investigation.

Indeed, the meaning of much of the data discussed here is as clear and one would hope. We cannot be entirely sure the existing system captures all the defense-related (or other interests) contributions to the various candidates: other money perhaps coming to them through dark money, seemingly non-defense related PACs, or some other circuitous route. While OpenSecrets.org is to be commended for its thorough and assiduous work, the American political contributions system is so purposefully complex and full of loopholes and lax enforcement that subterranean money can, and should, be assumed to be at play in unknown amounts.

In any case, it is clear that defense corporations, especially, will seek to exercise influence with the presidential candidates, especially the leading ones, with results we will know only after the fact, if at all. The way the vested interests initiate that process is with contributions. That process is alive and well and the conduits are being amply filled.

Other salient lessons that can be learned from the data above is that –

* Bernie Sanders is being targeted for future defense industry access;
* Donald Trump is not pulling nearly as much public money from defense corporations as the Democrats – nor as one might expect.
* Joe Biden is not a particularly competitive defense industry contributions collector, but both Elizabeth Warren and Pete Buttigieg are.

**Note on Sources & Author**: OpenSecrets.org of the Center for Responsive Politics is the source of the data presented in the table and some of the text above (as the links show). At its website OpenSecrets.org explains that most of its data come from the federal government – i.e. the Federal Elections Commission, the IRS and more. Some of their data also come from non-governmental sources such as ActBlue.com which serves as a medium for contributions to Democratic candidates.

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