

WASHINGTON NEWS

Super PAC hits jackpot with Chinese company stock

BY ASHLEY BALCERZAK,
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CENTER FOR PUBLIC INTEGRITY

WASHINGTON – Women Vote!, the super PAC branch of abortion rights group Emily's List, earned more than \$5.4 million in May after selling stock it owned in Baidu Inc. – a Chinese technology behemoth with reported ties to China's Communist Party.

The money Women Vote! earned from the stock sale, which occurred as trade and economic tensions between the United States and China were rapidly escalating, represents more than

half the money the Democrat-backing super PAC collected during May.

"We cleared the donation through our lawyers," Emily's List press secretary Alexandra De Luca told the Center for Public Integrity. "They didn't see a problem as it's a publicly traded company" on the NASDAQ exchange.

Emily's List first obtained 21,635 shares of Baidu stock on May 1 when California physician Karla Jurvetson donated it, newly released Federal Election Commission records show.

It sold the stock on May 10, near a historical high for the stock's share price.

Jurvetson is the former wife of em-

battled venture capitalist Steve Jurvetson, who in the past three years has been accused of sexual harassment.

He denies the accusations and has left the firm he helped found.

One elections watchdog doesn't consider the Baidu stock transaction problematic.

"The super PAC may feel a debt of gratitude to Karla, not to Baidu," said Brendan Fischer, director of federal and FEC reform at the nonpartisan Campaign Legal Center. "The timing of the donation and selling of the shares was close. One scenario that might have raised eyebrows: If the group held on to the shares, leaving

the financial interests of the super PAC tied up with the financial success of the company. But it doesn't seem like that was at play here."

Women Vote! most recently spent \$2.4 million on mailers and media buys to support Sara Jacobs, 29, a congressional candidate who lost in California's 49th District primary.

It's also spent \$247,000 on mailers backing Democrat Madeleine Dean in her race to represent Pennsylvania's 4th Congressional District.

Women Vote! also spent \$264,000 to support Democratic candidate Cindy Axne in Iowa's 3rd District congressional race and \$310,000 to back

Katherine Porter in California's 45th Congressional District.

In addition to the Baidu stock sale, liberal megadonor and Paloma Partners president Donald Sussman donated \$2 million to Women Vote! in late May.

Women Vote!, which as a super PAC may raise and spend unlimited amounts of money to advocate for and against political candidates, ended May with nearly \$3 million cash on hand.

The Center for Public Integrity is a nonprofit investigative news organization based in Washington.

Expanded supplemental benefits go beyond 'primarily health-related'



Tribune News Service file photo

Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., is architect of Chronic Care Act, which has financial incentives for using telehealth services.

Medicare plans to offer a wider array of supplemental benefits to the chronically ill, eliminating the current requirement that the extra benefits must be "primarily health-related."

John G. Lovelace, president of government programs at UPMC Health Plan in Pittsburgh, said the extra benefits could include visits by a personal assistant to help with bathing and dressing; visits by a nurse or a pharmacist to make sure a Medicare beneficiary with a dozen prescriptions is taking the right medicines; and special supervised housing for a person with dementia who cannot be left alone.

John K. Gorman, a former Medicare official who is a consultant to many insurers, predicted rapid growth in the use of high-tech pill-dispensing machines, remote monitoring of homebound people and telehealth services to connect patients with doctors hundreds of miles away.

The Chronic Care Act provides new financial incentives for the use of telehealth services, including coverage for stroke patients in traditional Medicare, as well as Medicare Advantage.

David M. Certner, the legis-

lative policy director of AARP, the lobbying group for older Americans, said his organization supports the idea of allowing greater coverage for supplemental benefits, including nonmedical services that can improve care.

"We believe such coverage should be available under both Medicare Advantage and traditional Medicare," he said.

Defining eligibility and limiting the scope of benefits in traditional Medicare could be a challenge. But Eva H. DuGoff, a health services researcher at the University of Maryland, said, "We can learn from Medicare Advantage plans which services have the most benefits for which populations."

Sarah L. Szanton, a professor at Johns Hopkins University, developed an experimental program that gave 1,000 low-income Medicare beneficiaries extra services, including several visits from a nurse, an occupational therapist and a handyman who did minor home repairs and modifications. These services, she said, saved Medicare an average of \$22,000 a year for each beneficiary, keeping people safe at home and avoiding hospital and nursing home admissions.

Delays in detainees' hearings magnified under 'zero tolerance'

BY KRISTINA DAVIS
SAN DIEGO UNION-TRIBUNE

SAN DIEGO – Jose Dominguez-Vasquez was stopped in a vehicle east of Tecate, Calif., by a Border Patrol agent at 4:13 p.m. on a recent Friday.

He admitted he was not in the country legally, having just crossed the border. He was arrested and spent the weekend in jail.

When it came time for his scheduled appearance before a federal judge Monday in San Diego, he wasn't in court.

Neither was Arturo Garcia-Gomez, or Adriana Hernandez-Jimenez, or several others arrested over the weekend who were supposed to be there.

By the end of the day, public defenders had filed 18 writs of habeas corpus, demanding that their clients be presented in court or be released.

Failures to bring new arrestees to court in a timely manner has been an issue off and on for years in San Diego and Imperial counties, and defense attorneys say that the problem has grown in the past couple of months as the Trump administration said it would criminally prosecute all illegal border crossings under a "zero tolerance" policy.

The crackdown has put pressure on the federal justice system along the Southwest border as law enforcement, detentions and courts have tried to adjust to the ballooning caseload.

Since mid-April, when U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions announced the new policy, public defenders in San Diego have filed 138 habeas corpus petitions, a civil remedy that in Latin means "produce the body." That's compared with 13 filed over such time last year, according to court records.

The U.S. Attorney's Office declined to comment on the habeas petitions.

A defendant's initial court appearance is an important first step in a criminal case. It is when a defendant learns of the charges, a judge appoints an attorney and the parties discuss the possibility of bail.

The reasons given for the delays in court appearances have varied, and the responsibilities seem to be shared by several parts of the system.

"It's like Groundhog Day," public defender Ryan Stitt said after bringing a new batch of habeas petitions last week. "The excuses are all the same."

While delays can affect any kind of federal defendant, it is overwhelmingly affecting those charged with immigration offenses. The U.S. attorney's office has been dismissing some misdemeanor illegal entry cases after habeas petitions have been filed.

In mid-May, a computer glitch that affected the national federal prison system, including the Metropolitan Correctional Center in San Diego, or MCC, delayed dozens of arrestees from getting to court in a timely fashion. Prosecutors dropped about 30 of the misdemeanor illegal-entry cases and went forward with the few felony re-entry cases. Another 20 or so cases have been dismissed since then. Those defendants were released into immigration custody to begin the civil deportation process.

The number of dismissed cases is just a small fraction

of the more than 1,200 misdemeanor illegal-entry cases charged in the Southern District of California since the zero-tolerance policy went into effect.

Instead, what happens most often is a judicial order that gives the defendants an extra day to be produced.

The issue of getting defendants to court on time has been litigated several times in recent years in San Diego. The federal court addressed problems in 2011 during an increase in illegal border crossings, and again in 2015.

As a result, the Southern District of California operates under this rule of thumb: if a person is arrested before 6 a.m., he or she should be arraigned that same day. But if the arrest happens after 6 a.m., it is generally accepted to produce him or her for court the following day.

The court has laid out valid reasons for delay: humanitarian issues, such as a hospitalization; the unavailability of government personnel or judges to complete arraignment; and extra time needed to determine if criminal charges should be filed.

The court has also ruled that problems with the booking process or medical screening at the MCC aren't valid reasons.

Before defendants can be presented in court, they must first be booked into the MCC and X-rayed for signs of tuberculosis.

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"An inexpensive railing in the bath can avoid a fall that can cause a hip fracture and potential complications," said David Sayen, who worked at the Medicare agency for 37 years.

Medicare Advantage plans must cover all the services that the original Medicare program covers except hospice care, and many offer extra benefits, as well. Until now, the government has generally required each Medicare plan to offer the same benefits with the same cost-sharing to all beneficiaries. The Trump administration has reinterpreted the "uniformity requirement" to allow different supplemental benefits for people with different medical needs. Congress went further and allowed Medicare officials to waive those requirements for patients with chronic illnesses.

Moreover, Congress allowed

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