

Obama inauguration to allow unlimited corporate donations

By Andre Damon
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The Obama administration announced Friday that it will accept unlimited corporate donations to finance the president's second inauguration, with special perks to corporations and individuals that make big donations.

The move marks a reversal from Obama's position in 2009, when it decided not to take any donations from corporations, and capped individual contributions at \$50,000.

The White House sent out a solicitation to large donors on Friday, offering three different levels of privilege in the inauguration ceremonies, with the largest, the "Washington" package, going to individuals who donate more than \$250,000, or corporations that donate over \$1 million.

Such a donation grants tickets to a "Benefactors Reception," a children's concert, a "Candle Light Celebration at The National Building Museum," and the inaugural ball, along with two reserved bleacher seats at the inaugural parade.

Addie Whisenant, spokeswoman for the Obama's inauguration committee, said that the committee was revising its standards because individual donors were exhausted after bankrolling the most expensive election campaign in human history, with the Democratic Party raising \$1.14 billion for Obama's election.

In 2009, Obama made much of his refusal to allow corporate donations to the inaugural committee, a marketing ploy aimed at presenting a "change" from the politics as usual and the Bush administration in particular.

Prior to the first inauguration, Obama's inaugural committee said that, "it will abide by an unprecedented set of limitations on fundraising as part of President-elect Obama's pledge to put the country on a new path. Unlike previous inaugural committees, the [Presidential Inaugural Committee] will not accept

contributions from corporations."

In Bush's 2005 inauguration, dozens of corporations, including Bank of America, Time Warner, Wachovia, Home Depot, the Ritz-Carlton Hotel Co. and Pfizer Inc, gave the maximum limit of \$250,000.

The 2009 announcement was nothing more than a gesture by a candidate who, from the beginning, made clear that he would continue in all essentials the basic policies of his predecessor—from the bailout of the banks, to the expansion of war and the attack on democratic rights.

Nevertheless, the reversal is a sign that in his second term Obama hopes to forge even closer relations with big business, as he proceeds to spearhead an attack on core government health care programs and intensify the assault on the working class. Indeed, this year the administration is actually breaking new ground by having no top limit on campaign donations.

The White House sought to hide its open gesture to corporations and the rich by claiming that lobbyists and political action committees will be banned from donating. John Wonderlich of the Sunlight foundation, a government transparency group, noted, "If BP's lobbyists can't donate, isn't a donation from BP itself far, far more problematic?"

The administration likewise stated that companies with conflicts of interest would be banned from donating. All corporations are in some way subject to federal regulation and impacted by laws.

The White House has likewise said that corporations that have received money through the Troubled Asset Relief Program, but have not paid it back, would be ineligible to donate. With all of the major Wall Street firms having long since paid back their TARP funds, which themselves constituted a small fraction of the bank bailout, the provision is essentially meaningless.

According to the *New York Times*, “Committee officials counter that Mr. Obama is using standards adopted by civic institutions that take corporate money, including museums, philanthropic groups and service organizations like the Red Cross.” Such a comparison, too, is ridiculous, since these organizations are not responsible for overseeing, regulating, and prosecuting their donors.

Obama’s 2009 inauguration set a record for participation in any event in Washington D.C, with 1.8 million people turning out. However, with the population cooling to Obama, who won some five million fewer votes in his second election campaign than the first, turnout is expected to be much smaller.

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