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\$876 million mystery? Why is Donald Trump sending donation money to this shadowy entity

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Synopsis

US Presidential Election 2024: Launchpad Strategies, a mysterious company that surfaced less than a year ago, has received \$15 million from Donald Trump's campaign, raising questions about the transparency of campaign spending. Despite scrutiny over the firm's opaque operations, experts suggest it's designed for anonymity. The Federal Election Commission (FEC) remains unlikely to investigate due to political gridlock. This article explores the broader pattern of secretive spending within Trump's campaign and how the FEC's paralysis has enabled such practices to flourish.

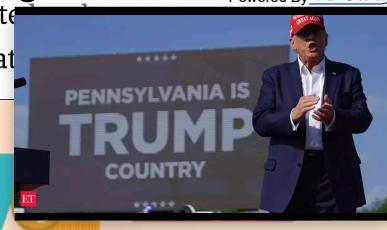


FILE - Republican presidential candidate former President Donald Trump arrives for a campaign rally, July 13, 2024, in Butler, Pa. (AP Photo/Evan Vucci, File)

Launchpad Strategies, a company incorporated less than a year ago, has received \$15 million from Donald Trump's election campaign. According to **campaign finance** records, the firm was hired to provide online advertising, digital consulting, and fundraising. Despite these claims, the firm remains shrouded in secrecy, with no identifiable strategists listed and minimal business registration information available.

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On its website, Launchpad describes itself as a “full-service [Republican digital agency](#) run by expert strategists,” yet the identities of these strategists remain undisclosed. An online contact form for the company does not appear to function, and business registration records in Delaware offer no further insight into who owns or runs the firm. The campaign’s payments to Launchpad Strategies are directed to a P.O. Box in North Carolina, further adding to the mystery.

Michael Kang, a law professor at Northwestern University, commented on the situation, saying, “The Trump campaigns sort of exhibit a lot of the patterns of behavior that we’ve become accustomed to with Trump and his associates. There does seem to be some kind of self-dealing in a lot of what they do when it comes to their financial matters.”

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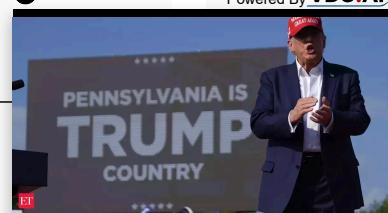


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A Broader Pattern of Opaque Spending

Launchpad Strategies is just one of several limited liability companies used by Trump's campaign to obscure financial transactions. A review of Federal Election Commission (FEC) records shows that over \$876 million has passed through six such companies over the past nine years. While the filings meet the minimum requirements for disclosure, the ultimate recipients of this money remain unknown.

Campaign finance experts believe that the [Trump campaign](#) has used secretive business entities to prevent transparency regarding its spending. "It's hard to know if a secretive group like Launchpad is doing anything improper, and it's unlikely that the current Republican FEC commissioners would approve an investigation to find out," said Michelle Kuppersmith, executive director of the Campaign for Accountability, a government watchdog group.

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The \$15 million paid to Launchpad Strategies represents a small portion of overall election spending, but its existence raises concerns about whether donor money is being used wisely. Without clearer information about how the money is being spent, it is impossible to determine whether the funds are benefiting Trump's aides and allies or serving campaign interests.

FEC's Inaction on Trump Campaign Investigations

Despite concerns about transparency and potential [financial misconduct](#), the FEC, which is responsible for enforcing campaign finance laws, has not pursued investigations into Trump's campaign spending. This inaction is largely due to the deep ideological divide among the agency's commissioners, which has paralyzed investigations related to Trump's campaign for nearly two years.

One closed complaint involved allegations that two of the limited



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companies used by Trump's campaign were designed to conceal millions of dollars in payments to Trump family members or vendors controlled by campaign staff. However, the FEC's evenly divided structure—where no more than three of the six commissioners can belong to the same political party—has resulted in a consistent deadlock, preventing any meaningful action.

FEC Commissioner Ellen Weintraub, a Democrat, has maintained a tally showing that FEC attorneys recommended investigating 29 of the 59 complaints filed against Trump's campaign or fundraising committees. Yet, none of these investigations moved forward. The dysfunction, according to experts, has given political campaigns a "green light" to sidestep the transparency that voters need to make informed decisions.

"It's hard to know if a secretive group like Launchpad is doing anything improper, and it's unlikely that the current Republican FEC commissioners would approve an investigation to find out," said Kuppersmith.

Previous Allegations of Concealed Payments

Launchpad Strategies is not the only firm connected to Trump's campaign that has raised questions about its financial operations. Before its formation, [**American Made Media Consultants**](#) (AMMC), another limited liability company linked to Trump's 2020 campaign, faced scrutiny. FEC records show that AMMC received \$782 million during the 2020 election cycle.

AMMC was established in Delaware in 2018 by Brad Parscale, Trump's former campaign manager, who created the company to handle [**political advertising**](#). According to testimony from Sean Dollman, a Trump campaign finance official, the company was initially set up to relieve Parscale of time-consuming advertising duties. Dollman, in an interview with House Jan. 6 committee investigators, revealed that the campaign at times directed him on which subcontractors to hire through AMMC.

One of the subcontractors was Phunware, a Texas-based app developer that had financial struggles but had previously established connections with Parscale. As money continued to flow through AMMC, Dollman was promoted to chief financial officer of Trump's 2020 campaign, earning \$40,000 per month.

In 2020, the Campaign Legal Center (CLC) lodged a formal complaint with the FEC, accusing AMMC of acting as a "conduit" to obscure transactions between individuals under the control of the campaign. The complaint also alleged that AMMC paid campaign staff salaries, including those of Trump's daughter-in-law, [**Trump and Kimberly Guilfoyle**](#), Donald Trump Jr.'s then-girlfriend, through Parscale's consulting firm.

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The Trump campaign dismissed the complaint as a “headline-seeking publicity stunt.” However, FEC attorneys found the allegations credible and recommended further investigation in April 2022, noting that there was “reason to believe” campaign finance laws had been violated. Despite this, the FEC split along party lines, with a 3-3 vote that effectively killed the probe.

Similar Practices Across Campaigns

Trump’s campaign is not alone in employing opaque firms. Other political campaigns, including President Joe Biden’s, have also engaged with companies that lack transparency. Biden’s campaigns, for example, paid \$522 million to Media Buying & Analytics LLC, a Georgia-based company. While the firm shares some similarities with Launchpad Strategies, it left clearer digital fingerprints, linking it to an established Democratic-aligned media firm, Canal Partners Media.

Bobby Kahn, president of Canal Partners Media, acknowledged that Media Buying & Analytics was created to handle the complex financial and paperwork demands of a presidential campaign. Kahn explained that the company, while independent, was responsible for managing advertising contracts and ensuring legal compliance.

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