



Former Virginia Gov. McDonnell and Wife Charged With Corruption

Immediately after former Virginia Governor Robert McDonnell and his wife Maureen [were charged](#) with 14 counts of fraud and conspiracy, McDonnell responded with a seven-minute-long declaration of innocence while his attorneys [filed a motion](#) challenging the government's legal theory used in bringing the charges. The charges stem from a four-year relationship the McDonnells had with the wealthy owner of a nutritional supplement company who allegedly bought special favors from them with loans, personal use of his private plane, and shopping trips.



The 43-page grand jury [indictment](#) was released on Tuesday and laid out in excruciatingly painful detail the alleged wrongdoings, quoting e-mails between Mrs. McDonnell and members of the governor's staff and with Jonnie Williams, the owner of Star Scientific, the maker of a nutritional supplement called Anatabloc. Here are some of those details:

In or about March 2009, as a result of requests from Robert McDonnell's staff to [Jonnie Williams - referred to throughout as "JW"], Robert McDonnell began using a jet aircraft owned by JW during his campaign for Governor of Virginia. Prior to this time, Robert McDonnell and JW had never met, and they had no personal or professional relationship...

On or about October 3, 2010, JW agreed to let Robert McDonnell use JW's aircraft to fly from Richmond, Virginia, to Sacramento, California, for a political event.... JW used the trip as an opportunity to discuss Star Scientific's products directly with Robert McDonnell.... JW told Robert McDonnell that Star Scientific needed the assistance of the Virginia [state] government, and Robert McDonnell told JW that he would put JW in contact with the Virginia Secretary of Health and Human Resources...

The indictment spelled out the wrongdoing:

In or about April 2011 through in or about March 2013, the defendants [Robert and Maureen McDonnell] participated in a scheme to use Robert McDonnell's official position as the Governor of Virginia to enrich the defendants and their family members by soliciting and obtaining payments, loans, gifts and other things of value from JW and Star Scientific in exchange for Robert McDonnell and the [Office of the Government of Virginia] performing official actions on an as-needed bases, as opportunities arose, to legitimize, promote ... Star Scientific's products, including Anatabloc ... the defendants took steps throughout that time to conceal the scheme.

There were shopping sprees where Williams bought clothes for Mrs. McDonnell at Oscar de la Renta, Louis Vuitton and Bergdorf Goodman. There were private meetings at the Governor's mansion between the governor, his wife, and Williams, discussing their need for cash to help pay



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for weddings, the inaugural ball, and provide desperately needed cash infusions into a real estate rental company owned by McDonnell and his sister. The indictment detailed the loans that were off the books. Mrs. McDonnell received loans from Williams and then used some of the proceeds to buy stock in Star. She sold those shares late in the year and then repurchased them after the first of the year to avoid having them disclosed on the governor's financial disclosure statements.

And on and on, for 43 pages. If found guilty, the McDonnells will be spending decades behind bars.

The media had a field day exploring, even excavating, the document. [Politico](#) described the "vast array of favors Williams lavished upon the McDonnell family" including the \$20,000 shopping spree, the \$6,500 Rolex watch bought by Williams that Mrs. McDonnell gave to her husband, the catering fees for the wedding reception of their daughter. [Fox News](#) told how Williams "plied the McDonnells with gifts and loans and, in return, received access in order to peddle his products," while the [Huffington Post](#) was only too happy to point out that Williams' largess wasn't limited to the McDonnells (Republicans) but extended to Virginia's Attorney General Ken Cuccinelli (also a Republican) who "also accepted \$18,000 worth of gifts from Williams and Star Scientific, although Cuccinelli wasn't included in the indictment.

The *Washington Post* was quick to point out the nefarious machinations Mrs. McDonnell undertook to keep her ownership of stock in Star off the records, concluding that:

Under Virginia law, if McDonnell or his wife held more than \$10,000 in Star stock at the end of either 2011 or 2012, he would have been required to disclose the holding on his annual statement of financial interest, filed each January.

His annual statements do not report any ownership of Star stock on his or his wife's part.

The *Post* took pains back in August of 2013 to explore the Cuccinelli involvement as well:

Virginia Attorney General Ken Cuccinelli, now running for governor, also purchased Star Scientific stock in 2010 and 2011 and failed to initially disclose it, as required by law.

He quietly amended his disclosure forms in October 2012 to reflect the holding, weeks before he designated the Richmond commonwealth attorney to investigate whether McDonnell had abided by state disclosure laws.

Cuccinelli has said his omission was inadvertent.

Cuccinelli lost the race to current Virginia Governor Terry McAuliffe in a nail-biter.

McDonnell immediately and noisily declared his innocence, [exclaiming](#), "I repeat again, emphatically, that I did nothing illegal for Mr. Williams." [He added](#):

While I deeply regret accepting these legal gifts and loans from Mr. Williams, all of these now have been returned or repaid with interest.

I have apologized for my poor judgment and I accept full responsibility for accepting these legal gifts and loans.

McDonnell then went on to claim "no harm, no foul" because "two independent investigations have confirmed that Mr. Williams and Star Scientific received nothing from the state." He called the charges listed in the indictment as based upon the "misguided" legal theory that arranging a meeting is now a federal crime if it involves a political donor, and added, "I will use every available resource and advocate that I have for as long as it takes to fight and prevail against these false allegations and the



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unjust overreach of the federal government.”

The McDonnells’ attorneys filed a motion [to challenge the indictment](#), claiming that “the federal government’s decision to use these deceitful tactics [the grand jury gave JW immunity for his testimony in the case] in order to prosecute the popular and successful Republican Governor immediately upon his leaving office is disgraceful, violates basic principles of justice, and is contemptuous of the citizens of Virginia who elected him.”

Whether McDonnell and his wife will be able to deflect and defend successfully the charges against them remains an open question. They will appear in court on Friday for arraignment and the setting of bonds.

A graduate of Cornell University and a former investment advisor, Bob is a regular contributor to The New American magazine and blogs frequently at www.LightFromTheRight.com, primarily on economics and politics. He can be reached at badelman@thenewamerican.com.



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