



The Most Powerful Woman on Team Trump (Hint: It's Not Ivanka)

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The most powerful woman on Donald Trump's team is not daughter Ivanka, wife Melania or intrepid spokesperson Kellyanne Conway.

Instead, at least in these early days as a Trump administration takes shape, the woman with potentially enormous influence is a 42-year-old mom with four kids who lives on the Upper West Side of New York City – a bastion of Democratic liberalism – and is part-owner of a cookie shop. Her \$28 million apartment is just up the street from Trump-branded buildings that removed his name this week.

She also has a master's degree from Stanford, once worked as a Wall Street trader and sits on the board of the conservative Heritage Foundation.

But perhaps most important, Rebekah Mercer is the daughter of Robert Mercer, the reclusive hedge-fund billionaire who is said to be a global-warming skeptic and who funds a raft of conservative causes in addition to donating to established think tanks like Heritage and the Cato Institute.

It is not too wild an exaggeration to say that Rebekah Mercer and her father, co-CEO of the wildly successful Renaissance Technologies, are two of the primary reasons Donald Trump will be the 45th president of the United States.

Until this year, Rebekah, the second of Mercer's three daughters, mostly flew below the public radar. She was an emerging force in the Republican Party, but outside the one-percent world of power and influence, she was little known.

That began to change dramatically in this election cycle when the Mercers laid down a big bet on the Republican presidential primaries, donating a total of about \$15.5 million to Keep the Promise I/Make America Number 1, a super PAC that was one of the main backers of Senator Ted Cruz of Texas, according to opensecrets.org, a unit of the Pew Center for Responsive Politics. The PAC later formed an offshoot called Defeat Crooked Hillary.

After a particularly nasty battle with Trump, Cruz was vanquished, and he was hardly gracious in defeat: At the Republican convention in July, he failed to endorse the GOP nominee.

The Mercers apparently didn't hold the same grudge. In May, according to [a profile in *The Washington Post*](#), Rebekah Mercer met with Ivanka Trump and Jared Kushner, Ivanka's husband and a close adviser to her father, and agreed to back Trump. Rebekah Mercer's influence on the Trump campaign was felt swiftly.

In July, Republican pollster Conway, who was running the Make America Number 1 PAC, was installed as a senior adviser to Paul Manafort, then the Trump campaign chief. She was replaced at the PAC by David Bossie, head of the conservative advocacy group Citizens United, which was responsible for bringing the eponymous case that led the Supreme Court to alter drastically campaign-finance rules.

Manafort was dispatched a month later and replaced by Steve Bannon, the right-wing provocateur, filmmaker and ex-Wall Streeter who was executive chairman of Breitbart News, a recipient of Mercer money. Conway became manager of the campaign.

Conway and Bannon, perhaps more than any others, turned the campaign around and are responsible for Trump's surprise victory. Although it may not have been a surprise to them: As Conway said on *Meet the Press* last Sunday, the Clinton campaign "misread America."

One reason the Trump campaign may have been more tuned into the mood of the electorate is Cambridge Analytica, a data-analytics company funded by Robert Mercer that collected more than \$5 million working for the Cruz campaign before switching over to Trump.

Cambridge shares a Beverly Hills, California, address with Breitbart News and Glittering Steel, a film and video production company controlled by Bannon. In fact, Salon is reporting Wednesday that a campaign-finance watchdog group has asked the FBI to investigate almost [\\$1 million in payments](#) made by the Make America Number 1 PAC to Glittering Steel.

Rebekah Mercer now sits on the executive committee of the Trump transition team, where she can help influence the shape of the incoming administration. Bannon, whose appointment as Trump's chief White House strategist has [sparked an outcry](#), is also on the committee. And Conway remains an integral part of the Trump team.

John Bolton, former ambassador to the U.N. under George W. Bush and a Fox News commentator, is now said to be a candidate for Secretary of State, along with former New York mayor Rudy Giuliani. The John Bolton Super PAC, aimed at making "America's defense and foreign policy a significant factor in federal elections," got a \$1 million donation from Robert Mercer this election cycle.

And Trump Tower had a surprising visitor earlier this week when Senator Cruz, who has been mentioned as a possible nominee for the Supreme Court, made an appearance. If Rebekah Mercer was around, no doubt he said hi