

# VANITY FAIR

## Low-rent grifter Scott Pruitt proves no con is too small

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Since Scott Pruitt was sworn in as Environmental Protection Agency administrator in February 2017, he's worked diligently to gut regulations intended to protect both human health and the planet, suppressed scientific research, and generally done the bidding of his buddies in the oil and gas industries. Which makes it all the more impressive that in addition to being one of the most effective implementers of Donald Trump's agenda, he's had time for a second incredibly demanding job: full-time, sad-sack, dime-store corruption.

Though the last entry in the Scott Pruitt Grifter canon involved used mattresses, the latest is somehow even more pathetic, revolving around his wife, fast food, and, of course, abuse of government resources. According to a new report from *The Washington Post*, three months after Pruitt started his new gig in Washington—while he was living in an apartment rented to him for \$50 a night by a lobbyist who had business before the E.P.A.—he had his executive scheduler reach out to Dan Cathy, chairman and president of Chick-fil-A, to request a meeting to discuss a “potential business opportunity.” Perhaps aware of the fact that his ask might come off a bit shady, Pruitt kept the “opportunity” a secret until he met with someone from the company's legal department, after a scheduled call with Cathy was canceled. Only in person did Pruitt reveal that he was hoping for his wife, Marlyn, to become a Chick-fil-A franchisee, a highly sought-after and lucrative gig that some 40,000 people express interest in each year, with only 0.25 percent being selected, according to company representative Carrie Kurlander. But Pruitt's interest in his wife running a Chick-fil-A apparently had nothing to do with the restaurant's exceptional spicy chicken sandwiches, or its history of anti-gay activism: according to multiple current and former E.P.A aides, Pruitt had “told them he was eager for his wife to start receiving a salary,” apparently expressing frustration “in part [at] the high cost of maintaining homes in both Washington and Oklahoma.” (In Oklahoma, the Pruitts have an \$850,000 mortgage on their home, the financing for which was provided by a bank run by a guy named Albert Kelly—Kelly, who was recently barred from working in the finance industry, had the good fortune to bounce

back with a job as one of Pruitt's top E.P.A. aides.) The E.P.A. declined the *Post*'s request for comment.

Sadly for Pruitt, his questionable use of government resources did not pay off (“Administrator Pruitt’s wife started, but did not complete, the Chick-fil-A franchisee application,” Kurlander said in a statement), although it wasn’t for lack of trying and potentially violating federal ethics laws in the process! As Don Fox, former head of the federal Office of Government Ethics during the Obama administration, told the *Post*, a cabinet official using his position to ask a C.E.O. about a job for his spouse “raises the specter of misuse of public office. . . . It’s not much different [from] if he [had] asked the aide to facilitate getting a franchise for himself.” And asking his scheduler, Sydney Hupp, to set up the meeting may represent a violation of federal rules that prevent officials from asking subordinates to do personal tasks for them: the same rule Pruitt likely broke when he asked another subordinate to source him a previously owned Trump hotel mattress. “It is a misuse of the aide’s time to ask the aide to do something like this that is really for personal financial benefit,” Fox said.

Luckily, Pruitt was able to score some extra cash in May 2017, when his wife was paid \$2,000 for three days’ work: helping to organize an event for New York nonprofit Concordia. Pruitt, who agreed to speak at the event, came with “at least” three aides in tow and spent \$1,201.80 on first-class plane tickets and \$669 for an overnight hotel stay, where we can only assume he demanded an upgrade to the presidential suite. (In a statement, Concordia executive Matthew Swift said “Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Pruitt ever solicited a position for Mrs. Pruitt at Concordia, nor was it a condition of the agreement for the administrator to speak.”)

Anyway, stay tuned for next week—or, more likely, for the next 12 hours—when it emerges that Pruitt instructed an aide to see how much he could get for White House silverware he pocketed during a state dinner, or had his backyard in Tulsa classified as a Superfund site and uses the funds to build himself an above-ground pool.

When we last checked in with Charlie Kushner, Jared’s father was blastingcritics for blaming his eldest son for one of the worst real-estate deals in history, and for generally being mean to his baby. Apparently, though, the ex-con—whose son ran the family business while he was in prison for illegal campaign contributions, tax evasion, and witness tampering—had still more to get off his chest, and used a recent interview with *The Real Deal* to continue his rant against all the people who just want to tear down young Jared because of his success.

After beginning the sit-down by asking reporters Will Parker and Konrad Putzier, “Are you guys going to be assholes today, or are you going to give us a fair shake? Because you’ve been assholes in the past” and “Do you want me to throw you out of here now? Because I will. Then you can write whatever the f--k you want about me,” Kushner went on to attack federal ethics watchdogs, who have raised a number of questions about Jared’s ongoing financial entanglements and conflicts of interest while serving as a senior adviser to the president. “Do you really want to know what I think of those jerks,” Charlie asked in response to the question of whether or not Jared should have fully divested from the Kushner Cos., rather than retaining a financial stake in the company. “I think they’re a waste of time. They’re guys who can’t get a

real job, ethics watchdog? Who gets a job—ethics watchdog? Give me a break.” According to Chuck, such individuals are a scourge on society who want to discourage “rich, smart, successful people from going to into government” and “assure that [only] poor, not successful people go into government.” (Kushner the Elder maintains that accomplished non-poorers can be trusted to self-report; “if you’re successful . . . you know when there’s a conflict,” he says.)

But what really gets Daddy Kushner’s goat? The fact that no one gives Jared, or his wife Ivanka, credit for giving up everything to go into public service (even though, incidentally, they both continue to make money off of their companies). “I look at what my kids have sacrificed to go into government, with the only intent of doing good for this country and for the world, and to help people,” he said, not mentioning the administration policies that expressly do not help people. “And what they have sacrificed, and the daily barrage of negative media, and the attacks they get, and they had a perfect, beautiful life and they still have a very good life, but they sacrificed a lot.”

Think about that perfect, beautiful life next time you want to raise (perfectly reasonable) questions about the couple’s ongoing conflicts of interest, ya jerks.

“Trade is a very complex thing with many layers. When you talk about it, slogans are very different than policies that makes sense,” Dimon said during a conference call with reporters. “One of the flies in the ointments is this trade stuff. This trade stuff is not only directly affecting decision but it also increases uncertainty and uncertainty is not a friend of the economy.”

President Donald Trump’s order to keep failing coal and nuclear power plants open—and a proposal to use obscure executive powers to achieve that goal—has been slammed by environmentalists, energy-industry groups, and competitive-power markets. It turns out conservative and libertarian free-market think tanks are not fans of the plan either.

“This has no intellectual basis by anybody beyond the third grade,” Peter Van Doren, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute told CNBC, unintentionally summing up the entire Trump administration. “This is like the tariffs. Find your supporters and hand out stuff and hope,” he said, referring to the president’s wildly planned steel and aluminum duties. “If you can find anyone who’s market-oriented or says they’re conservative and supports this, they should turn in their badge.”