



Biden Must Halt Big Tech From Revolving Into Government

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Big Tech's big influence in Washington

It is well-known that Amazon, Apple, Facebook, Google, and Microsoft, the Big Tech corporations, are the [five most valuable companies in the United States](#). Even throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, while unemployment soars, and small businesses and working families suffer, the corporations' market power and dominance have [exploded](#).

These Big Tech corporations once exemplified American entrepreneurship and ingenuity—but in recent years have come under scrutiny for threatening our country and citizens' privacy, democracy, innovation, and workers. In the race to amass monopoly power in their respective markets, each of these corporations has developed predatory business practices that [harvest user data for profit](#). In addition, Facebook and Google have wielded unprecedented influence [over our democratic process](#). All of these companies have [killed](#), rather than fostered innovation. And during the COVID-19 pandemic, Amazon has taken advantage of Americans by [tripling its profits on price gouged essential goods](#).

To date, these tech corporations have been able to peddle unfettered influence in Washington without accountability because they have bought off our government. A [report Public Citizen released in 2018](#) detailed how Big Tech corporations have blanketed Capitol Hill with lobbyists, and lavished members of Congress with campaign contributions.

Today, we highlight another tool of influence that Big Tech wields: the reverse revolving door. Reverse revolvers, as we identify them here, are former Big Tech executives, lobbyists, lawyers and consultants, who are now in influential federal government positions. In their new roles, reverse revolvers continue to serve the moneyed interests of their past employers and clients, corrupting the federal government with policies, contracts, and decisions that benefit Big Tech—not workers, small businesses, or consumers.

Big Tech's influence over our government is unprecedented and unparalleled, and we must bring the revolving door to a close.

The Trump administration employed over 20 reverse revolvers from Big Tech.

Public Citizen used ProPublica's [Trump Town database](#) to identify Trump administration appointees who have received financial compensation from the 5 Big Tech companies covered in this report: Amazon, Apple, Facebook, Google, and Microsoft. We identified 18 Trump administration appointees that have worked for or on behalf of Big Tech companies. In addition, a [previous investigation by Public Citizen](#) into technology conflicts of interest in the Federal

Trade Commission (FTC) revealed three additional appointees that are reverse revolvers. Below is the full list.

Name	Service	Amazon	Apple	Facebook	Google	Microsoft	Department
Stephen Alexander Vaden	Lawyer				x		Department of Agriculture
Jeffrey Kessler	Lawyer		x	x	x		Department of Commerce
Richard Apollo Fuhrman	Executive					x	Department of Commerce
Anthony G DeMartino	Consultant	x					Department of Defense
Sally Donnelly	Consultant	x					Department of Defense
Laura M Caliguiri	Executive					x	Department of Health and Human Services
Beth Ann Williams	Lawyer			x			Department of Justice
Robert Bernstein	Lawyer					x	Department of Labor
Martha Maria Pacold	Lawyer					x	Department of Treasury
Andrew Smith	Unknown	x		x		x	Federal Trade Commission
Bruce D Hoffman	Unknown				x		Federal Trade Commission
Joseph J Simons	Lawyer					x	Federal Trade Commission
John F Ring	Lawyer	x			x		National Labor Relations Board
Kristan King Nevins	Consultant	x					Office of the Vice President
Matthew E Morgan	Lawyer					x	Office of the Vice President
Jimmy F Billimoria	Executive	x					Small Business Administration
Christopher Harnisch	Executive		x				State Department
Ashley Hickey Marquis	Consultant		x				White House Office
Dino Luigi LaVerghatta	Lawyer				x		White House Office
Joseph W Joe Hagin	Consultant				x		White House Office
Ryan Donley Brady	Lawyer					x	White House Office

Source: [ProPublica's Trump Town Database](#), last updated Oct 2019; [Public Citizen report](#), last updated May 2019

Some reverse revolvers helped Big Tech gain access to government contracts.

The worry with reverse revolvers is that, in the best case, they may remain influenced by the perspective of their former employers, and, in the worst case, they do the bidding of their former employers and clients within their new roles.

Consider recent developments at the Department of Defense (DoD). Big Tech has become a big player in the Pentagon, jockeying for contracts in the way contractors like Lockheed Martin and Raytheon have in the past. And the corporations' secret weapons in these bidding wars are reverse revolvers.

Sally Donnelly, a former consultant for Amazon Web Services, was appointed in January 2017 as a top aide to General James Mattis, then-Secretary of Defense. [ProPublica reported](#) that Donnelly helped Amazon gain unrivaled access to the Department of Defense. Right as the DoD started finalizing its famed \$10 billion, 10-year contract to move its data systems to the cloud (known as JEDI), Donnelly organized a private dinner for General Mattis, Jeff Bezos, and a top sales executive of Amazon.

Tony DeMartino, a former employee of Donnelly and Amazon consultant, was brought into the DoD as Deputy Chief of Staff to General Mattis. Despite ethics guidance that warned him against involvement, [emails reviewed by ProPublica](#) revealed that DeMartino repeatedly tried to stay involved in the JEDI project. Though Amazon didn't win the JEDI bidding war, [the company continues to challenge the DoD's decision to this day](#), illustrating just how big of a business interest the contract is to the company.

Outside the Department of Defense, other appointments are of concern. [In 2018, Public Citizen revealed](#) that Federal Trade Commission's head of the Consumer Protection Bureau, Andrew Smith, registered 120 corporate conflicts of interest, including with Amazon, Facebook, and Microsoft. Because of his conflicts with Facebook, Smith has been unable to participate in high-stakes cases of intense public interest, like the [\\$5 billion settlement with Facebook](#) the FTC approved last July.

However, settlements Smith did participate in have disappointed public advocates, administering light slaps on the wrist to corporations, rather than meaningful incentives to change. In an alarming pattern, Smith pursues settlements that simply do not go far enough to protect consumers against unfair and deceptive corporate practices.

In September 2019, Smith led a settlement with YouTube after the allegations that the company illegally collected children's personal information. Both Democratic commissioners of the FTC voted against the settlement because it [did not go far enough to penalize the company](#), and because it [does not require the company to change its product enough](#) to ensure YouTube is safe for children. Facing this opposition, Smith doubled down, [telling reporters](#), "I have to respectfully disagree with the detractors. This is a historic fine by anybody's standards."

A recent proposed settlement in response to allegations that Zoom deceived users about their security practices also disappoints. It provides no help for affected users, and according to [Commissioner Chopra's dissenting statement](#), "does not require Zoom to pay a dime." Unsurprisingly, Smith defended the settlement, [saying](#), "this action will help to make sure that Zoom meetings and data about Zoom users are protected".

The Biden administration has an opportunity to shut the revolving door to Big Tech.

Early hires on President-elect Biden's transition team and administration have connections to Big Tech. Future appointments should steer clear of conflicts of interest with these corporations. It will be important for the administration to remain vigilant about conflicts in areas of the government where, historically, conflicts with Big Tech corporations would not be expected. These gargantuan corporations now have broad interests that have expanded in every area of government, as illustrated by the Department of Defense example above.

President-elect Biden should clearly distinguish his tenure in office on day one from President Trump's by shutting the revolving door. He can start with a strong executive order, closing the

reverse revolving door to government positions from those who have worked in industry where there may be conflicts of interest.

But since conflicts of interest in Big Tech span the entire government, we urge the Biden administration to halt the revolving door to and from Big Tech altogether. In November, Public Citizen and 31 progressive groups [sent a letter](#) to President-elect Joe Biden urging him to exclude Big Tech executives, lobbyists, lawyers and consultants from his administration. Now is the time for the Biden administration to shut the revolving door from Big Tech and begin to bring these corporations to account.