

ADVERTISEMENT

[Advertise with Mother Jones](#)

In the news:

Impeachment Updates

Reentry Housing

Kamala Harris

Food Stamps

SUBSCRIBE TO OUR MAGAZINE

POLITICS ENVIRONMENT CRIME AND JUSTICE FOOD MEDIA INVESTIGATIONS PHOTOS MAGAZINE PODCASTS

Dear reader,

"Billionaires Are Not the Answer:" That's my new column, where I unpack what's at stake for our democracy as power concentrates into fewer and fewer hands. I hope you'll give it a read and that you'll help build an alternative where the rest of us have a say by supporting *Mother Jones'* journalism with a year-end gift today. We have an ambitious \$600,000 fundraising goal this month, and we can't afford to come up short for 2020.



Monika Bauerlein, CEO

POLITICS

SEPTEMBER 6, 2019

Johnson & Johnson Was on Trial for the Opioid Crisis. 33 Lawmakers Took Its Money Anyway.

Will they return the drug “kingpin’s” cash?



MATT COHEN

Fellow

Bio



Mark Raiston/AFP/Getty Images

Nearly three dozen members of Congress accepted campaign contributions from Johnson & Johnson during the embattled company's trial in Oklahoma earlier this year for its role in causing the opioid epidemic, an analysis of federal campaign filing data reveals. [Advertise with Mother Jones](#) The money has gone to Democrats and Republicans, party leaders and back-benchers, freshmen members and long-time incumbents. Two Oklahoma lawmakers—Sen. James Lankford and Rep. Markwayne Mullin, both Republicans—accepted donations from the company, despite the enormous publicity the trial generated in their state. So far, none of the lawmakers has announced plans to return the donations.

Johnson & Johnson PAC Contributions

May 28—June 30, 2019

Includes contributions to campaign committees and leadership PACs

Chart: Matt Cohen/Mother Jones • Source: [Federal Elections Committee](#) • [Embed](#)

Johnson & Johnson—probably best known for making baby powder, soap, and other household products—has long been lobbying Congress and donating money to politicians. But since the Oklahoma trial started in May, it has drawn new scrutiny over its lucrative pharmaceutical business, which, the state argued, fueled the opioid crisis by overselling its pain medication and promoting the idea that such drugs were safe. The state also accused Johnson & Johnson of quietly dominating the opioid market by growing mutant poppies in Tasmania and selling its narcotic products to some of the leading drug companies, including Purdue Pharma, the maker of Oxycontin. Last week, the judge presiding over the case ruled that the company helped cause a crisis that “ravaged the state of Oklahoma” and ordered it to pay \$571 million in damages. According to the judge:

ADVERTISEMENT

[Advertise with Mother Jones](#)

ADVERTISEMENT

Defendants promoted their specific opioids using misleading marketing. Among other things, they sent sales representatives into Oklahoma doctors' offices to deliver misleading messages, they disseminated misleading pamphlets, coupons, and other printed materials for patients and doctors, and they misleadingly advertised their drugs over the internet—all of which occurred in Oklahoma. But Defendants also pervasively promoted the use of opioids generally. This “unbranded” marketing included things like print materials that misleadingly touted the safety and efficacy of opioids as a class of pain medication, as well as online materials that promoted opioids generally.

As *Mother Jones* has reported, recently unsealed court documents related to separate litigation detailed how Johnson & Johnson and other big drug companies helped create a “pain movement” in order to sell more pills. Janssen Pharmaceuticals, part of Johnson & Johnson's drug division, was one of five companies that together funneled almost \$9 million to patient advocacy groups and organizations that lobbied on opioid policy, according to a 2018 investigation by former Missouri Sen. Claire McCaskill.

Johnson & Johnson has also poured money into directly influencing federal lawmakers. So far this year, the company has spent \$100,000 on lobbying efforts that include “general issues regarding health care and opioids,” according to its federal filings. The company did not respond to a request for comment about what those lobbying efforts specifically entail.

All the while, the Johnson & Johnson's political action committee has been plying lawmakers with cash, giving a total of \$86,500 to more than 70 members of Congress and nearly two dozen PACs in the first half of 2019 alone, according to filings with the Federal Election Commission. (The most recent FEC filings cover the quarter ending June 30, meaning that any contributions made since then aren't included.)

Thirty-three of those lawmakers appear to have received Johnson & Johnson contributions—totaling \$69,000—during the trial, at a time when headlines about the company's involvement in the opioid crisis would have been hard to miss. Among them is Lankford, the Oklahoma senator, who, according to his filings, received a \$2,000 contribution on May 28, the day the trial began. Mullin, who represents Oklahoma's 2nd congressional district, pocketed \$1,000 from Johnson & Johnson in June, just days after Oklahoma Attorney General Mike Hunter described the company as an opioid “kingpin” that had sought to “brainwash prescribers with pseudoscience.”

Other high-profile recipients of Johnson & Johnson donations since May include Texas Republican Sen. John Cornyn, who

received \$6,000 in contributions to his campaign and leadership PAC; North Carolina Republican Sen. Thom Tillis, who took in \$2,500; and Virginia Democratic Sen. Tim Kaine, who accepted \$5,000 for his campaign and leadership PAC. House Majority Whip Jim Clyburn (D-S.C.), who has a lengthy history of taking money from pharmaceutical companies, received \$6,500 in Johnson & Johnson contributions in June. None of these lawmakers responded to requests for comment.

LOOKING FOR NEWS YOU CAN TRUST?

Subscribe to our free newsletters.

THE BIG QUESTION...

as we head into 2020 is whether politics and media will be a billionaires' game, or a playing field where the rest of us have a shot. That's what *Mother Jones* CEO Monika Bauerlein tackles in her annual December column—"Billionaires Are Not the Answer"—about the state of journalism and our plans for the year ahead.

We can't afford to let independent reporting depend on the goodwill of the superrich: Please help *Mother Jones* build an alternative to oligarchy that is funded by and answerable to its readers. Please join us with a tax-deductible, year-end donation so we can keep going after the big stories without fear, favor, or false equivalency.

More about: [Congress](#) [Health](#) [Money in Politics](#) [Opioids](#) [More](#)

RELATED



Johnson and Johnson Was Just Found Liable for Fueling the Opioid Epidemic In a Historic Trial

[JULIA LURIE](#)



Doctors Are Still Prescribing Opioids to Kids After Taking Out Their Tonsils

[NICOLE JAVORSKY](#)



Inside Johnson and Johnson's Quiet Domination of the Opioid Market

[JULIA LURIE](#)



Standing Alongside Pompeo, Russia's Foreign Minister Denies Election Interference

[AJ VICENS](#)

ADVERTISEMENT

WE RECOMMEND



Impeachment Against Trump

INAE OH

House Democrats Announce Two Articles of



Pentagon Spending Bill Won't Reverse Trump's Transgender Ban

DAN SPINELLI



Discrimination in the Workplace

LAURA THOMPSON

It's 2019 and Female Pilots Are Still Fighting Pregnancy



Kamala Was a Cop. Black People Knew It First.

CAMILLE SQUIRES

ADVERTISEMENT

LATEST



Trump Goes After FBI Director for Backing IG Report's Findings

INA E OH



Here's What Trump's SNAP Cuts Will Really Do

NATHALIE BAPTISTE



Montana's Water Rights Are Getting Harder to Manage Because of New Development

HELEN SANTORO



Inspector General's Report Shows Trump's "Spygate" Conspiracy Theory Was the Real Hoax

DAVID CORN

ADVERTISEMENT

We have a new comment system! We are now using Coral, from Vox Media, for comments on all new articles. We'd love your feedback.

[VIEW COMMENTS](#)

Independent. In print. In your mailbox.

December 2019

October 2019

August 2019

Inexpensive, too! Subscribe today and get a full year of Mother Jones for just \$12.

Smart. Fearless. Audio.

It's us but for your ears. Listen on Apple Podcasts.

[Subscribe »](#)

Looking for news you can trust?

Subscribe to our free newsletters.



ABOUT

- [Our Staff](#)
- [Financials](#)
- [Jobs](#)
- [Events](#)
- [Contact Us](#)

SUPPORT

- [Ways to Give](#)
- [Advertise With Us](#)
- [Store](#)

SUBSCRIBE

- [Magazine Subscriptions](#)
- [Give a Gift Subscription](#)
- [Email Newsletters](#)
- [Podcasts](#)
- [Customer Service](#)

