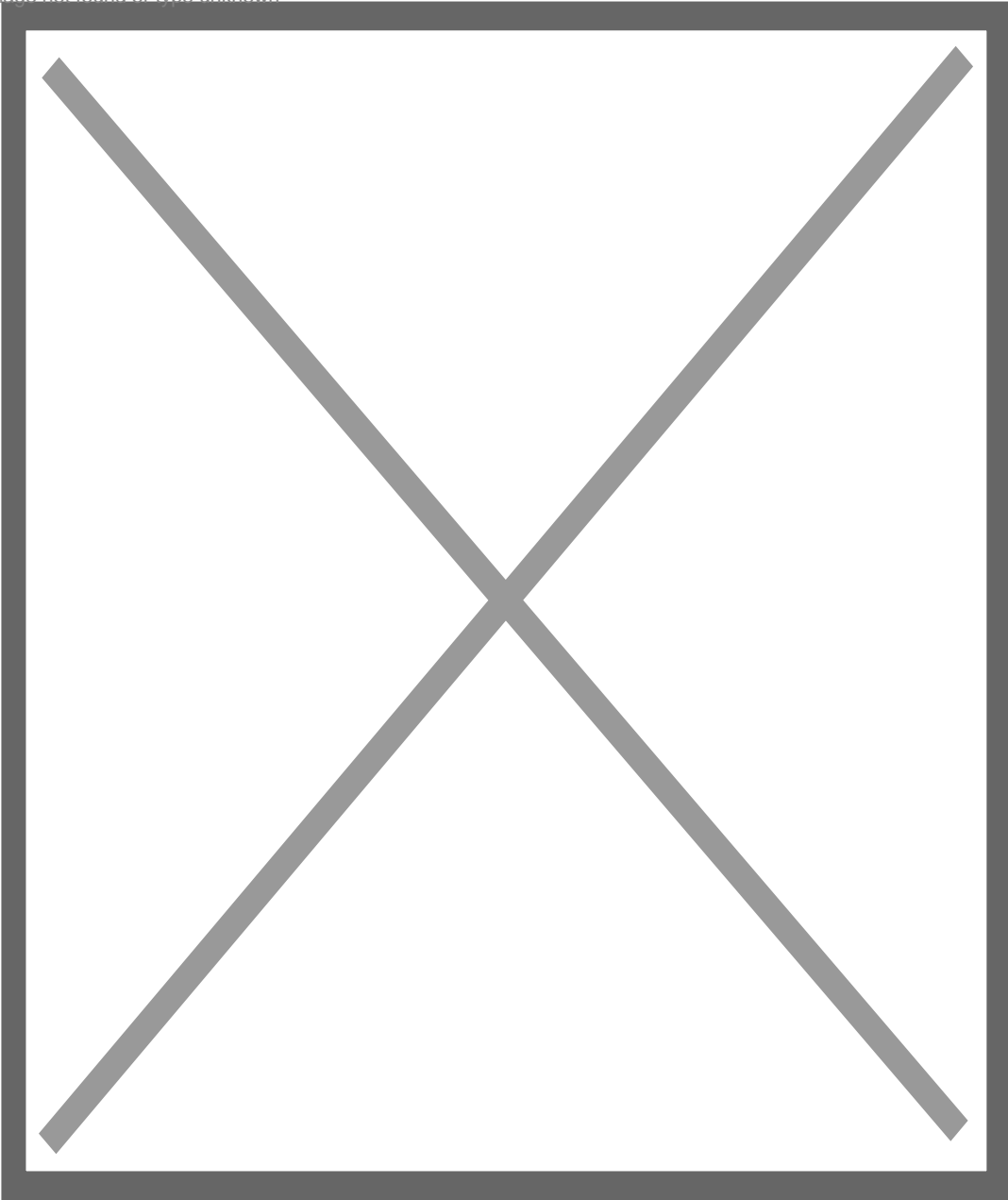


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Washington, May 6 (RHC)-- Documents obtained by ProPublica and published earlier this week reveal that billionaire real estate tycoon Harlon Crow paid tens of thousands of dollars for U.S. Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas' grandnephew to attend two elite private schools.

It's the latest in a string of recent revelations about how the Republican megadonor has lavished Thomas with hundreds of thousands of dollars in gifts over the past 25 years -- handouts the Supreme Court justice failed to disclose in apparent violation of federal ethics rules, raising questions about his judicial independence and eliciting demands for his resignation or impeachment.

Thomas took legal custody of his grandnephew Mark Martin when he was six years old and raised him "as a son" in the suburbs of Washington, D.C. In 2008, Thomas sent a teenaged Martin to Hidden Lake Academy, a private boarding school in northern Georgia.

"Tuition at the boarding school ran more than \$6,000 a month. But Thomas did not cover the bill," ProPublica reported. "A bank statement for the school from July 2009, buried in unrelated court filings, shows the source of Martin's tuition payment for that month: the company of billionaire real estate magnate Harlan Crow."

Citing Christopher Grimwood, a former administrator at the school, the outlet noted that "the payments extended beyond that month." Grimwood, whose role gave him access to pertinent financial information, divulged that "Crow paid Martin's tuition the entire time he was a student there, which was about a year."

According to revelations published by ProPublica, before and after his time at Hidden Lake, Martin attended a second boarding school, Randolph-Macon Academy in Virginia. "Harlan said he was paying for the tuition at Randolph-Macon Academy as well," Grimwood said, recalling a conversation he had with Crow during a visit to the billionaire's Adirondacks estate.

The exact total Crow paid for Martin's education over the years remains unclear. If he paid for all four years at the two schools, the price tag could have exceeded \$150,000, according to public records of tuition rates at the schools.

Thomas did not report the tuition payments from Crow on his annual financial disclosures. Several years earlier, Thomas disclosed a gift of \$5,000 for Martin's education from another friend. It is not clear why he reported that payment but not Crow's.

Additional information about the secret financial ties between Crow and Thomas is fanning the flames of outrage over the jurist's blatant disregard for basic ethical standards. "Just straight-up open corruption on the Supreme Court," tweeted journalist Isaac Bailey. "Thomas effectively remakes the law while remaining above it."

"This ethical crisis at the Supreme Court just keeps getting worse," Brett Edkins, managing director of policy and political affairs at Stand Up America, said in a statement. "For two decades, Clarence Thomas failed to disclose private jet travel, trips on luxury yachts, and other gifts from GOP megadonor Harlan Crow. After Crow purchased three properties from Thomas, the billionaire acted as his mother's landlord, remodeling her home while charging \$0 in rent. Now we've learned that Crow bankrolled Thomas' grandnephew's attendance to exclusive private boarding schools."

"We don't yet know the full extent of Justice Thomas' ethical violations, but the existing evidence of a corrupt relationship is overwhelming and should alarm every American," said Edkins. "Congress must hold this court in check and restore public trust in our justice system by conducting a thorough investigation into Thomas' financial dealings with Crow and finally passing a code of ethics for the Supreme Court. The American people should have confidence that their highest court is free from corruption." "The court needs an enforceable code of ethics—or it risks losing its credibility."

There is mounting evidence of a potential connection between Crow's gifts to Thomas, which the jurist sought to keep hidden, and Thomas' inclination to rule in ways favorable to his super-rich benefactor.

Not only does Crow have links to numerous right-wing groups involved in Supreme Court cases since Thomas was first confirmed to the bench in 1991, but his own real estate company, Crow Holdings, was directly implicated in a 2021 case before the court.

As The Lever reported last week, Thomas voted to end the Covid-era federal eviction moratorium after Crow Holdings described the lifesaving policy as a threat to its "profit margins." Now, as a group of New

York City landlords prepares to ask the high court to overturn local rent control laws denounced by Crow Holdings—a move that would endanger rent stabilization efforts nationwide—"there is no indication" Thomas would recuse himself, the outlet noted.

Furthermore, as Common Dreams reported Tuesday, data shows that after Thomas provided a deciding vote in the Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission case, the Crow family's average annual campaign contributions surged by 862%, from \$163,241 before 2010 to \$1.57 million since. The massive jump underscores how the 5-4 ruling that effectively legalized unlimited political spending has increased the wealthy's ability to shape electoral outcomes, further undermining U.S. democracy.

Earlier this week, right-wing lawmakers accused Thomas' critics of engaging in what Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Texas) called a "smear campaign." Sen. Mike Lee (R-Utah) went so far as to say that "when this chapter of American history is written, those who attack Justice Thomas today will be justly dismissed as intolerant bigots."

Then came ProPublica's latest exposé, which, combined with previous bombshell reports and the aforementioned examples of Thomas' pro-Crow rulings, refutes the GOP's claim that Thomas is the victim of a witch hunt.

Notably, Thomas is not alone when it comes to conflicts of interest on the high court. Last week, Politicoreported that just days after his April 2017 confirmation, Justice Neil Gorsuch and his business partners sold a 40-acre Colorado ranch for almost \$2 million to an undisclosed person. The buyer, Brian Duffy, is the CEO of a law firm that has since been involved in 22 cases before the court.

Despite growing evidence of apparent corruption, Chief Justice John Roberts has refused to accept an invitation to testify at an upcoming Senate Judiciary Committee hearing on potential reforms to the Supreme Court, which is now controlled by six far-right justices, most of whom were appointed by Republican presidents who lost the popular vote.

"If the Supreme Court won't act, Congress must," Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) tweeted Thursday. "The court needs an enforceable code of ethics—or it risks losing its credibility."

In addition to imposing robust ethics rules, progressives have called for other far-reaching changes to disempower the country's "rogue" justices, including adding seats—something that has been done seven times throughout U.S. history.

Polling data shows that public approval of the Supreme Court has fallen sharply in the months since its reactionary supermajority eliminated the constitutional right to abortion care, among other harmful and unpopular decisions. According to a survey conducted in April, nearly two-thirds of U.S. adults no longer have confidence in the nation's top judicial body.

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