

McCain Fund-Raiser Has Ties to Equatorial Guinea

By Mary Lu Carnevale
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Mary Jacoby reports on political fund-raising.

Charlie Black, a senior adviser to Sen. John McCain’s presidential campaign, has drawn a lot of attention for his past lobbying for foreign governments with records of human rights abuses. Earlier this year, he severed all lobbying ties. But it turns out that one of his former firm’s controversial clients from the mid 1990s has connections to the McCain network.

Oil-rich Equatorial Guinea, the only Spanish-speaking country in Africa, is represented in Washington by Juan Carlos Benitez, a top McCain fund-raiser.

Security forces have tortured prisoners, elections are “seriously flawed,” and corruption is endemic in the West African nation, according to the State Department’s annual report on human rights around the world. In 2004, top officials were implicated in a money-laundering scandal involving the former Riggs Bank in Washington.

By then, Black’s old firm, Black Manafort Stone & Kelly, had stopped representing the country.

In 2004, Equatorial Guinea entered into a \$120,000-a-month contract with Benitez’s firm, Cassidy & Associates, records at the Justice Department show. The contract, which calls for “enhancing the United States’ understanding of Equatorial Guinea’s history, culture and strategic goals,” remains active, DOJ records show.

Cassidy & Associates spokesman Tom Alexander said Black had nothing to do Equatorial Guinea’s decision to hire Cassidy in 2004. And Benitez has bipartisan company on the account: The lead Cassidy lobbyist for the country is Amos Hochstein, who served as deputy campaign manager for Democratic Sen. Chris Dodd of Connecticut in his failed bid for the presidential nomination.

Benitez has committed to raise between \$50,000 and \$100,000 for the Arizona Republican, according to McCain’s Web site.

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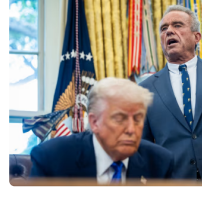
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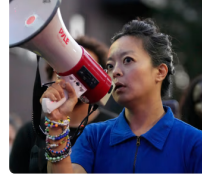
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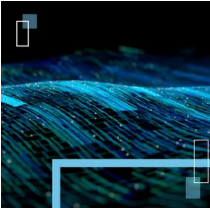


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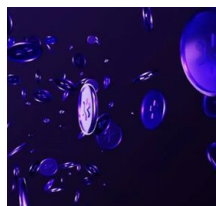
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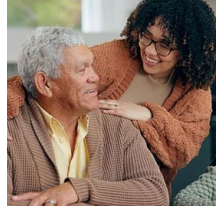
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