

The \$1 million dinner: When big donor Bill Dore meets Rick Santorum

by [Keenan Steiner](#) |  | JULY 1, 2013, 4:42 P.M.

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Early in January 2012, just after Iowa voters had catapulted him into the top tier of Republican presidential candidates and desperately trying to come up with the funds to capitalize on it, Rick Santorum had a private dinner in Florida with a would-be angel investor. The complicated -- and evolving -- tale of how that dinner ended speaks volumes about how the Supreme Court's 2010 decision in Citizens United has changed politics.

As [energy executive Bill Doré](#) tells it, he told the GOP contender that he wanted to give him \$1 million -- an amount far beyond what a candidate for federal office is legally permitted to accept. What happened next is a matter of some dispute.



In an initial interview with Sunlight, Doré said it was Santorum himself who told him about the existence of the [Red, White and Blue Fund](#), a super PAC [founded by a former campaign staffer](#) that ultimately spent [about \\$7.5 million](#) to blitz the airwaves and contact voters on Santorum's behalf in [various states' primaries](#) before he bowed out of the race in April. Doré ended up giving \$2.25 million of that money, making him the super PAC's most generous donor.

When a reporter expressed surprise on hearing that Santorum directed Doré to the super PAC, Doré backtracked. "I don't want to get him in any sort of problem," Doré said. "I would not want to compromise his future."

Doré then suggested that Santorum had asked him to give it to the Republican Party, not the super PAC. When told by a reporter that Santorum would not have suggested the Republican Party because the maximum donation would only be around \$30,000, he confirmed that it was the super PAC that was discussed.

In a follow-up interview a few hours after the first one, Doré backtracked further. "After reflecting on that comment, I said to myself: Did he actually tell me that? I don't think he did." He maintained that it was Santorum's aides, not the former senator, who told him about the super PAC.

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Current Santorum aides did not respond to a request to discuss the incident. Email and phone messages left with [Patriot Voices](#), the 501(c)4 nonprofit group (and super PAC) founded by Santorum and his wife went unanswered. While there is nothing illegal in Doré's account, Campaign Legal Center senior counsel Paul S. Ryan said it "illustrates perfectly how ridiculous current law is and how much interaction current law accommodates between deep-pocketed donors and candidates themselves."

What's legal and what's not rests on a fine distinction: Federal candidates cannot request -- explicitly or implicitly -- contributions beyond what the law legally permits their campaign committees to receive. But, a donor may voluntarily discuss larger amounts, Ryan said. The maximum donation permitted to a federal candidate in the 2012 election: \$2,500 for the primary campaign and \$2,500 for the general campaign. Super PACs, theoretically unconnected to the candidates, have no upper limits on donations, making them a favored conduit of givers like Doré, who want to make a major difference in a campaign.

To Ryan, it illustrates the fallacy in the rationale behind the Supreme Court's Citizens United ruling, which held that money given to outside committees like super PACs does not corrupt candidates because the candidates aren't directly affiliated with them. "Reality shows a very close relationship between donor money and candidates," Ryan said.

The story of how Doré ended up meeting Santorum and donating money to his cause shows an even more intimate relationship than other reports of candidates interacting with super PAC donors. Santorum himself [attended a fundraiser](#) for his super PAC, as did [Mitt Romney](#). President Barack Obama [dispatched aides](#) to such events too.

Doré, a 69-year-old energy oil executive from Louisiana, said he had no personal connection with Santorum until their dinner in Miami. Long a behind-the-scenes player in Louisiana but not on the national stage, Doré said: "One time I saw him on television and decided he was the guy I wanted to run for president," Doré said. He would go on to donate a total of \$2.25 million to the super PAC.

One on one dinner in Miami

Doré did not know how to get in touch with Santorum but wanted to meet him in person before donating. A friend at UBS Financial said he could connect him with someone on the campaign.

Soon, he was talking to a female Santorum staffer, whose name he did not recall, who arranged a meeting with Santorum in Miami.

As Doré tells it, Santorum was trying to build his fledgling organization ahead of the Florida's Jan. 31 primary. Doré flew to Miami and arrived at a dinner that Santorum was having with his staff at a restaurant. Doré said Santorum left his staff so the two could have a private dinner at the same establishment.

In an interview with Sunlight, Doré recounted making a generous offer to the presidential candidate during the dinner: "I said I want to give you a million dollars to the campaign." According to Doré, Santorum told him he should talk to his staff whereupon Doré was introduced to Santorum staffers dining at the same restaurant.

The day after that dinner, Doré said, he called the same female campaign staffer who set up his meeting with Santorum. He said she told him to send his \$1 million check to the Red, White and Blue Fund and provided him with the address. That day, Doré, who had never donated to a super PAC before, wrote a \$1 million check to the Red, White and Blue Fund. The fund reported receipt of the

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money on January 11.

(Photo credit: Doré Energy)

 Rick Santorum Super PACs one-percent of the one-percent Bill Dore

1 percent of the 1 percent 2012 Red White and Blue Fund

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