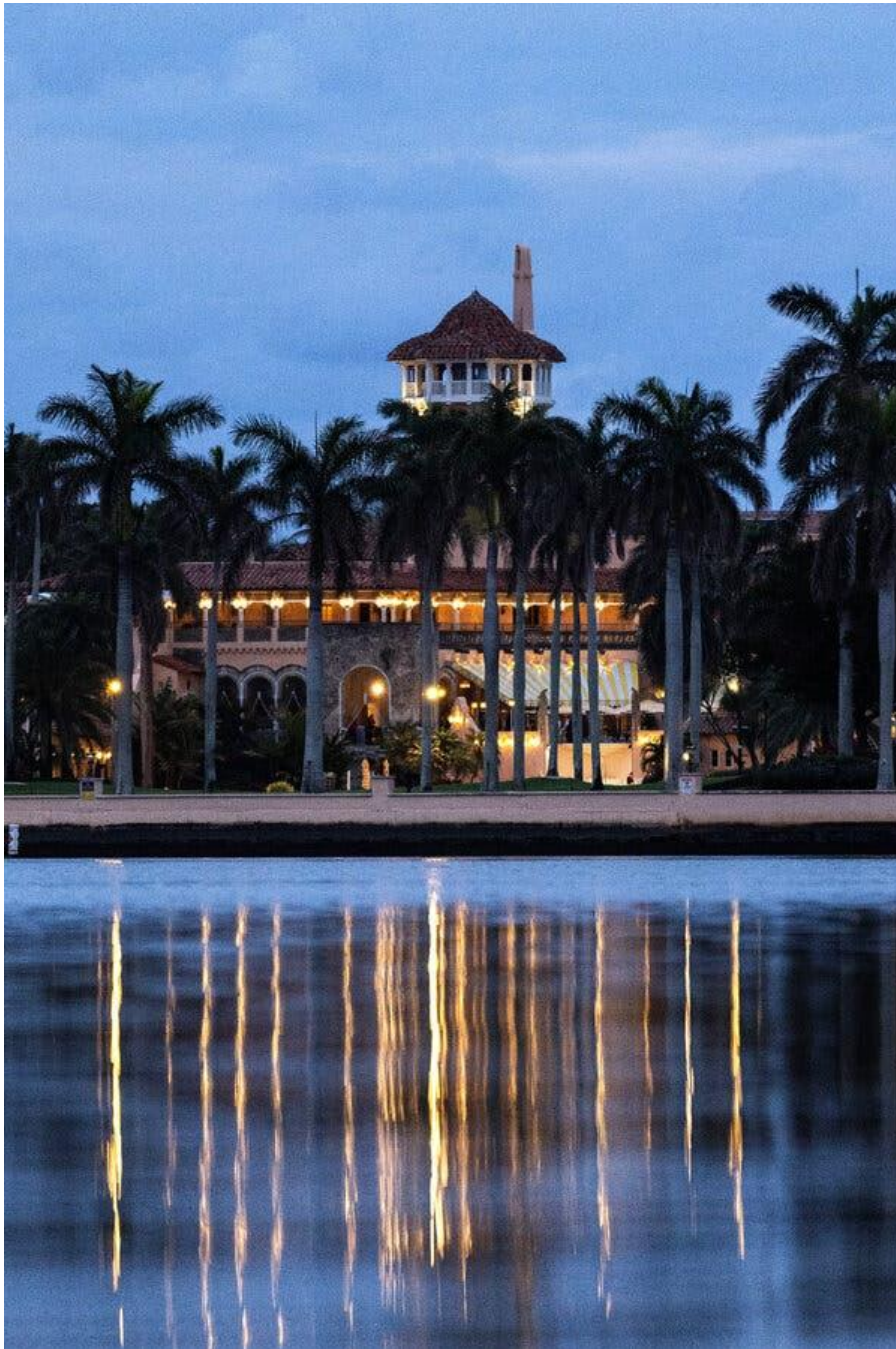


Trump Delayed a Medicare Change After Health Company Donations

The president posted talking points provided by one firm that donated millions, and his administration delayed a change on coverage of pricey bandages that could have hurt the company and others like it.



The head of Extremity Care joined a candlelit dinner in March at Mar-a-Lago, where he spoke of his company's regulatory concerns. Credit...Maddie McGarvey for The New York Times

By [Kenneth P. Vogel](#) [Sarah Kliff](#) and [Katie Thomas](#)

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Oliver Burckhardt came prepared for the dinner that President Trump hosted for a small group of major donors at his private Mar-a-Lago resort in South Florida on March 1.

A week earlier, one of Mr. Burckhardt's biotech companies had donated \$5 million to MAGA Inc., a pro-Trump political committee, that paved the way for him to attend the event.

At the dinner, Mr. Burckhardt got a chance to speak briefly to the president and other guests about himself and the work of his company, Extremity Care, which makes pricey medical products including paper-thin bandages made of dried bits of placenta, according to three people who spoke on the condition of anonymity to describe the private event. He also brought copies of a flier urging the Trump administration to reverse a plan to restrict Medicare reimbursement for the bandages and criticizing former President Joseph R. Biden Jr. for having "rammed through a policy that would create more suffering and death for diabetic patients on Medicare."

The next morning, Mr. Trump [posted the flier](#) on his social media site.

It was not just symbolic.

About one month later, the Trump administration [announced](#) it would delay until next year the Biden administration plan to limit Medicare's coverage of the bandages, known as skin substitutes, saying that it was reviewing its policies.

It was the culmination of an expensive influence campaign by Extremity Care that underscored Mr. Trump's willingness to grant access and preferential treatment to people and companies that fill the coffers of his political groups.

The February donation by Mr. Burckhardt's company, which was revealed in a report filed late last week with the Federal Election Commission, was among dozens of [seven- and eight-figure contributions to MAGA Inc.](#) from donors, many of whom were [rewarded with presidential face time](#) to plead for their causes.

It is not unusual for deep-pocketed interests to use political donations to try to win access, but Mr. Trump's hands-on participation in a fund-raising operation for a group devoted to him is unique for second-term presidents barred from running for re-election. It has created an opportunity for fund-raisers and lobbyists to boost their standing with Mr. Trump while advancing their clients' interests.

For example, several of the companies that donated to MAGA Inc. this year are represented by Brian Ballard, a top Trump fund-raiser who also attended the March dinner at Mar-a-Lago. His firm has been paid \$710,000 over the past 18 months to lobby for Extremity Care and a linked company.

For Extremity Care, the influence campaign was money well spent.

It helped secure support at the highest levels of the U.S. government to protect an important revenue stream for companies that sell skin substitutes to doctors, who use the products to heal stubborn wounds. Since April, the month when the Biden-initiated change would have otherwise gone into effect, Medicare has paid doctors and other medical providers more than \$2.3 billion for skin substitutes, according to an analysis that Early Read AI, a health care data analytics company based in Lincolnshire, Ill., conducted for The New York Times.

The Times had [previously revealed](#) Extremity's efforts to block the Medicare change. The website Popular Information [reported](#) this week on the filing showing the contribution to MAGA Inc..

In a statement, Extremity Care said that it supports “policies that result in increased health care access for patients to lifesaving treatments.” It added that “we’re grateful that the current administration has taken the time to understand the true and meaningful benefits lowered costs and national coverage will have for patients, for the industry as a whole and for Medicare and has taken action to support this critical mission.”

A spokeswoman for MAGA Inc. rejected the notion that Mr. Trump's decisions in office were based on rewarding donors, saying in a statement that he “always works for the best interest of the country.” She added that “any suggestion otherwise is false.”

The White House did not respond to a request for comment.

The dinner, which was billed on an invitation as a candlelit dinner with “very limited” space, came at a critical moment for Extremity Care and other distributors of skin substitutes.

Over the preceding three years, as companies exploited a loophole in Medicare billing rules that allowed them to set their own prices for the products, Medicare payments for skin substitutes rose from \$256 million in 2021 to \$10 billion last year. That was more than the public insurance program spent on ambulances or anesthesia in 2024.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, the federal agency that manages the health care programs, [has described](#) the growth in spending on the skin substitutes products as unprecedented, attributing it largely to “abusive pricing practices.”

A significant chunk of the new Medicare spending went to Extremity Care, which is based in suburban Philadelphia and co-owned by Mr. Burckhardt and Scott Madden.

The company has sold some of the most expensive skin substitute products on the market. One called [Restorigin](#), for example, began listing in January 2024 with a price of \$9,916 per square inch. At the time, the average price for that kind of product was around \$2,500.

Three months later, Medicare data shows the listing of another product sold by Extremity Care. That patch, Complete FT, sold for \$11,283 per square inch.

On those two products alone, Medicare has spent at least \$1.4 billion, according to an analysis of spending data from the National Association of Accountable Care Organizations.

The sharp rise in spending on the products sold by Extremity Care and other distributors drew the attention of Medicare regulators during the Biden administration. In April 2024, Medicare contractors released a [proposal](#) to limit the public insurer's coverage to the 17 products that were the subject of published research proving their effectiveness. That list did not include any Extremity Care bandages.

The company and an affiliate called Tiger Biosciences hired Mr. Ballard's firm, Ballard Partners, last year to lobby Congress and C.M.S., as well as the Department of Health and Human Services, according to lobbying forms, at least partly to provide "guidance and advocacy [related to Medicare coverage](#)."



The firm of Brian Ballard, a top Trump fund-raiser, has been paid \$710,000 over the past 18 months to lobby for Extremity Care and a linked company. Credit...Andrew Harrer/Bloomberg

And Extremity Care donated \$3 million to super PACs supporting Mr. Trump's campaign, including [\\$2 million](#) to [one that sought to mobilize his voters](#) and [\\$1 million](#) to another that [spent heavily on advertisements](#) attacking his Democratic opponents.

The donations helped Mr. Ballard arrange audiences for Mr. Burckhardt and Mr. Madden with Mr. Trump during the campaign.

And in early June 2024 — a couple of weeks after the \$1 million donation to the advertising super PAC, which was run by associates of Mr. Trump's political operation — he made a [post on his social media site](#) that echoed Extremity Care's concerns about the proposed new rule from the Biden administration tightening Medicare reimbursement.

“Crooked Joe Biden is saying Medicare will not cover more than 50,000 Americans living with horrible open wounds caused by diabetes,” Mr. Trump wrote, citing “testimony from doctors” and “groundbreaking medical research” ostensibly backing the products. “These people are hurting, but they should know that help is on the way this November!” he added.

As Mr. Trump was preparing to take office, some of the skin substitute companies and their executives donated to his inauguration, as well as to the campaign committee of his choice for health secretary, Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. (Mr. Burckhardt [donated](#) more than \$103,000 [to Mr. Kennedy](#) after the election, according to F.E.C. filings.)

The companies also [spent heavily on lobbyists](#) with ties to Mr. Trump's orbit, and pushed to stop the reimbursement change, which was set to go into effect in February of this year. Mr. Trump delayed that shortly after taking office as part of a blanket freeze on new regulations, pushing the new deadline to April.

Image



Robert F. Kennedy Jr., the health secretary, and Mr. Trump both received \$50,000 donations to their groups from Jason Matuszewski, the chief executive of Biostem, a skin substitute manufacturer that also hired Ballard Partners, according to lobbying filings. Credit...Eric Lee for The New York Times

Mr. Trump's posting of the flier in March provided by Mr. Burckhardt was welcomed as an encouraging sign, said Jason Matuszewski, the chief executive of Biostem, a skin substitute manufacturer that also [hired Ballard Partners](#) to lobby on "Medicare reimbursement for skin substitutes," according to [lobbying filings](#).

On its Instagram account days after Mr. Trump posted the flier, [Biostem thanked him](#), writing: "We agree this policy must end now and are eager to see the administration take that action."

In an interview, Mr. Matuszewski, who after the election donated \$50,000 to Mr. Trump's inauguration and [\\$50,000 to Mr. Kennedy's campaign](#), said "I think maybe somebody decided to listen."

But the industry was caught off guard in July. The Trump administration [changed course](#) and proposed a new plan that would lower skin substitute reimbursements to a flat fee of \$806 per square inch, a small fraction of what some companies currently earn. The proposal could go into effect next year if it is finalized.

The skin substitute industry immediately condemned the proposal but also saw an opening: They could lobby for a higher flat fee. In recent weeks, companies have coalesced around lobbying for a price of at least \$3,800 per square inch.

Last week, the chair of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, Senator Bill Cassidy of Louisiana, [proposed a bill](#) that would set a price more than five times as high as in the Trump administration plan.

The MASS Coalition, an industry group that Extremity Care helped form, praised the bill as “a common sense, practical solution that will save the Medicare program billions of dollars.”

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