



Shefali Razdan Duggal

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Bundling for Democracy and your Eggs Obama

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[\(The original version of this was on the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund blog\).](#)

That off-again, on-again morning meeting in San Jose between President Obama and a roundtable of Asian American business leaders represents the stark undemocratic reality of today's politics.

Not only is it closed to the media, but the participants' names are part of an exclusive list that haven't been readily disclosed. Are they embarrassed to be one of 20 or so to pay \$40,000 for the privilege of a private audience with the president? Unlikely.

Still, \$40,000 for some grub and gab with the president? If you're on a Grand Slam breakfast budget, you're out of luck. (Of course, at \$40k, I'm assuming with the president you get a meal.)

I figured there's at least one person I could ask who would know the details of this elite "roundtable." That would have to be Shefali Razdan Duggal, a 40-year-old, Indian-born, self-employed San Franciscan who has become a big bucks go-to person for Obama in Northern California.

Naturally, she deferred to the official press team of the president. But Shefali's definitely high up in the campaign to know what's going on since she's become what is known as a top "bundler."

Given that the individual limit to federal campaigns is generally \$2,500, people who want to get around that low ceiling, like say give \$40,000 for some Eggs Obama, just simply funnel the money directly to a person like Shefali.

She becomes the ribbon and bow around the checks that are then delivered to the campaign as "bundled."

Compared to a Super PAC, it may seem like a small hole in the system. Nevertheless, it's still a way to get around limits and funnel large amounts of money legally.

For 2012, Shefali has become one of the top Asian American bundlers for Obama in the nation. Earlier this year, the Obama campaign disclosed to the Federal Election Committee that she was responsible for between \$200,000–\$500,000 in bundled contributions, with her own personal lifetime contributions at \$122,177. (All the numbers come from the [campaign finance watchdog](http://campaignfinancewatchdog.org), opensecrets.org).

And that's a moderate amount among the 532 bundlers in 33 states who have raised about \$106.4 million for Obama and the DNC this election year.

Among Asian American Obama bundlers is Los Angeles-based Brian Lee, the LegalZoom entrepreneur who has given \$299,800 to the Obama campaign.

But it's the number of Asian Indian bundlers that seems to be more impressive. The list includes among others, the self-help guru, Deepak Chopra (\$197,000) and New York's Deven Parekh of Insight Venture Partners (\$226,100).

Asian Indians are actually the No.3 Asian American ethnic group after the Chinese and Filipinos. And yet when it comes to giving money, Indian Americans seem well represented.

I certainly didn't see many Chinese or Filipino names on Obama's bundlers list. Maybe the Chinese are still reeling over the donation scandals during the Clinton years.

Being a bundler is definitely legit and has its advantages. While everyone denies there's a quid pro quo, in politics, every penny matters—especially if you want something.

In the 2008 campaign, Hillsborough's John Roos was a big bundler for Obama while at the law firm Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati. And though his own personal contribution is on the books at a relatively modest \$41,600, I'm sure it was mere coincidence that Roos, a Lowell High alum was ultimately tabbed by Obama to serve as ambassador to Japan.

So my guess is the Asian American leaders at this somewhat secret "Roundtable" meeting are likely to be made up of primarily Indian American entrepreneurs and businessmen who see nothing wrong with giving \$40,000 for a little face time with the president to discuss such things as the flow of highly educated workers through immigration and special visas to work in their businesses. In other words, they'll talk about all their special issues.

This would ordinarily be seen as a form of "lobbying," but since there are few things lower in the likeability scale than "lobbyist," why impugn these wealthy private Asian American "roundtable-ists"?

Indeed, lobbyists are so disliked, Federal law requires that a campaign disclose only the bundling activity—of lobbyists.

That's why President Obama and the Democrats, having disclosed all 532 bundlers, are actually much more open and go above and beyond the law on this point than the GOP.

Maybe bundling isn't so bad, say compared to the current campaign finance villains, the Super-PACs.

Still, while the Obama has been upfront about his bundlers, the GOP has only disclosed that 22 registered lobbyists have bundled a measly \$2.9 million.

Romney's other bundlers? No one knows how much has been raised by how many. Romney hasn't disclosed them. Maybe he should. Now.

But this is how our democracy works today. There are lots of dark places where photo-ops give way to cash-ops.

And neither you nor I can have breakfast with the president in a closed-door roundtable.

Actually, I thought it would be nice if President Obama capped off Asian Pacific American Heritage Month with a nice fitting visit into the community to eat some veggie pork buns or something.

He could have visited Asian Health Services in Oakland and witnessed all the language issues they work around to provide health care to those who need it most. Or he could have visited Asian Americans for Community Involvement in San Jose.

But when the president is in campaign mode, there's little time in democracy for the unbundled.