

Missing the Point – More questions about Mayor Scott's Campaign Contributions and his Relationship with Venable Law

Wednesday, March 22, 2023



In [my previous op/ed](#), we talked about the optics of certain January 2023 contributions to Mayor Scott's campaign committee at a time when the Mayor was negotiating the sale of Baltimore's conduit system to BG&E. Certainly, the timing of these contributions might just be coincidental, but it could also be construed as indicative of a problematic relationship between money and the behavior of an elected official.

Turns out that optically questionable behavior involving the Mayor and campaign contributions is nothing new.

This op/ed is about three campaign committees and the 2018 primary election for Governor...

- "People for Brandon M. Scott," founded March 25, 2011.
- "Jim Shea for Maryland," founded March 16, 2017.
- The "Shea-Scott for Maryland Slate," founded April 10, 2018.

James Shea, a prominent attorney and former Chairman of the Venable law firm, was running for Governor. Brandon Scott, who was then Councilman for Baltimore's District 2, was campaigning with Mr. Shea for the position of Lt. Governor. A "slate" is

different than an individual candidate committee in that it is a committee for two or more candidates running together and, as such, is subject to somewhat different campaign contribution limits than a campaign committee for a single candidate.

I have no idea what Mr. Shea's expectations may have been when he filed as a candidate for Governor, but he received only 8.3% of the Democratic primary vote. Ben Jealous won with 39.6%. Rush Baker, the former County Executive of Prince George's County, came in second with 29.3%.

As his running mate, Mr. Shea's choice of Brandon Scott is "interesting." Brandon Scott is now Mayor of Baltimore, but was only a 34-year-old, second-term City Councilman when the June 26, 2018 primary was held. The question is, why did someone as accomplished and astute as James Shea select a running mate who was virtually unknown outside of Baltimore City and had no experience or other qualifications to govern Maryland?

Well, one reason might be to give the Shea ticket some racial balance. Mr. Shea is White. Mr. Scott is African American. Maybe Mr. Shea and his advisors thought that Mr. Scott would bring substantial Black votes from Baltimore with him, but that didn't happen. In any case, there were certainly other African American men and women in Baltimore who would have done much more for the Shea ticket, both politically and then administratively should Mr. Shea have been elected.

Maybe Mr. Shea thought that Jealous and Baker, both African Americans, would split the Black vote for Governor, allowing him to squeeze out a victory supported by mostly Democratic voters interested in having a White candidate go up against popular Republican incumbent Larry Hogan. Clearly, that strategy – and who knows what the Shea political team was really thinking – didn't work out either.

And here's a third, all-encompassing possible explanation. It's that Brandon Scott may have met not just one, but four important criteria to be James Shea's running mate.

- Brandon Scott is Black.
- He's from Baltimore and was reasonably well known among the city's African American voters.
- He was available. In other words, no other more qualified Baltimore City African American was willing to run with Mr. Shea in what would likely be an unsuccessful primary or general election effort.
- Brandon Scott was relatively inexperienced, politically out-classed and possibly even intimidated by the Shea organization and advisors – and willing to do whatever he was told.

Brandon Scott may have had no special qualifications to be Lt. Governor, but he was a convenient political choice.

As you know, in Maryland the legal limit for contributions to a single candidate during a given election cycle is \$6000. *Not \$6000 per year, but per election cycle which is four years long.* The election cycle that included the June 26, 2018 primary began January 1, 2015 and ran through December 31, 2018. With those dates in mind, let's look at contributions to Brandon Scott's campaign committee that occurred after it was announced that he would be running for Lt. Governor with James Shea on the top of the ticket.

So, Mr. Scott agrees to run and, together with Mr. Shea, they establish the "Shea-Scott Maryland Slate" on April 10, 2018, just two and half months ahead of the June 26, 2018 Democratic primary.

The table below shows selected contributions made by people listing their employer as either "Venable" or "Venable LLP" in reports filed by the Shea and Scott campaign committees. Contribution amounts are the total made by the contributor during the period indicated. For those making more than one contribution, the date shown is for the most recent of the two or more contributions made.

Contributions Showing "Employer" to be "Venable" or "Venable LLP" to Jim Shea for Maryland and to People for Brandon M. Scott							
Source... Maryland Board of Elections Website							
These are contributions made during the 4 year election cycle from January 1, 2015 through December 31, 2018 during which the maximum contribution for individuals is \$6000.							
From Venable to Shea Committee				From Venable to Scott Committee			
March - December 2017				April - Jun 2018			
Total From Venable... \$ 232,429				Total From Venable... \$ 173,500			
	Contributor	Date	Contribution		Contributor	Date	Total Contributed
1	Baldrige Douglas	4/6/17	\$ 6,000	Baldrige Douglas	4/17/18	\$ 2,000	\$ 8,000
2	Bryan Sally	4/17/17	\$ 6,000	Bryan Sally	4/16/18	\$ 6,000	\$ 12,000
3	Cimino Frank	4/19/17	\$ 6,000	Cimino Frank	4/20/18	\$ 3,000	\$ 9,000
4	Civdanes Emilio	5/15/18	\$ 5,500	Civdanes Emilio	6/19/18	\$ 2,000	\$ 7,500
5	Cooney John	4/6/17	\$ 6,000	Cooney John	4/10/18	\$ 2,500	\$ 8,500
6	Curran J. Joseph	6/22/17	\$ 6,000	Curran J. Joseph	5/30/18	\$ 5,000	\$ 11,000
7	DeLong Stephanie	4/6/17	\$ 6,000	DeLong Stephanie	5/1/18	\$ 2,500	\$ 8,500
8	Garinther Geoffrey R.	3/28/17	\$ 6,000	Garinther Geoffrey R.	4/13/18	\$ 6,000	\$ 12,000
9	Gesner Lawrence H	4/1/17	\$ 6,000	Gesner Lawrence H	4/16/18	\$ 6,000	\$ 12,000
10	Gottlieb Robert	12/26/17	\$ 6,000	Gottlieb Robert	4/30/18	\$ 3,000	\$ 9,000
11	Green Douglas	4/25/17	\$ 6,000	Green Douglas	4/30/18	\$ 3,000	\$ 9,000
12	Hamel Warren	4/11/17	\$ 6,000	Hamel Warren	4/10/18	\$ 6,000	\$ 12,000
13	Heubeck David	4/13/17	\$ 6,000	Heubeck David	4/10/18	\$ 6,000	\$ 12,000
14	Hommer Scott	4/21/17	\$ 6,000	Hommer Scott	5/2/18	\$ 6,000	\$ 12,000
15	Horn Todd	4/6/17	\$ 6,000	Horn Todd	4/19/18	\$ 6,000	\$ 12,000
16	Ingis Stuart	4/12/17	\$ 6,000	Ingis Stuart	4/30/18	\$ 6,000	\$ 12,000
17	Marshall Stephen E	7/31/17	\$ 6,000	Marshall Stephen E	5/3/18	\$ 4,000	\$ 10,000
18	McCauley John	4/13/17	\$ 6,000	McCauley John	4/18/18	\$ 6,000	\$ 12,000
19	Meyer Lindsay	4/20/17	\$ 6,000	Meyer Lindsay	5/16/18	\$ 6,000	\$ 12,000
20	Millsbaugh Ted	4/6/17	\$ 6,000	Millsbaugh Ted	4/23/18	\$ 3,000	\$ 9,000
21	Mirviss Mitchell	4/10/17	\$ 6,000	Mirviss Mitchell	4/10/18	\$ 6,000	\$ 12,000
22	Moylan Daniel P	4/15/17	\$ 6,000	Moylan Daniel P	5/14/18	\$ 1,000	\$ 7,000
23	Nelson James	4/4/17	\$ 6,000	Nelson James	4/20/18	\$ 6,000	\$ 12,000
24	Parker Bruce	12/13/17	\$ 5,000	Parker Bruce	4/11/18	\$ 3,000	\$ 8,000
25	Pryor Mark	4/20/17	\$ 6,000	Pryor Mark	5/9/18	\$ 6,000	\$ 12,000
26	Roberts Ted	4/14/17	\$ 6,000	Roberts Theodore	6/1/18	\$ 1,000	\$ 7,000
27	Rosso Anthony	4/13/17	\$ 6,000	Rosso Anthony	4/17/18	\$ 6,000	\$ 12,000
28	Russell William	4/7/17	\$ 6,000	Russell William	5/3/18	\$ 2,000	\$ 8,000
29	Sangiama Dino	4/25/17	\$ 6,000	Sangiama Dino	5/3/18	\$ 6,000	\$ 12,000
30	Schmelter Joe	4/13/17	\$ 6,000	Schmelter Joe	5/3/18	\$ 2,500	\$ 8,500
31	Sidell Bruce R	3/21/17	\$ 6,000	Sidell Bruce R	4/11/18	\$ 6,000	\$ 12,000
32	Strain Paul F.	4/17/17	\$ 6,000	Strain Paul F.	4/16/18	\$ 6,000	\$ 12,000
33	Thompson Craig A	4/14/17	\$ 6,000	Thompson Craig A	4/19/18	\$ 3,000	\$ 9,000
34	Tobin Stacie E.	12/10/17	\$ 5,929	Tobin Stacie	6/19/18	\$ 1,000	\$ 6,929
35	Tyler Ralph S	3/24/17	\$ 6,000	Tyler Ralph S	4/12/18	\$ 6,000	\$ 12,000
36	Volner Ian D	4/25/17	\$ 6,000	Volner Ian D	4/30/18	\$ 6,000	\$ 12,000
37	Waldman Robert L	5/3/17	\$ 6,000	Waldman Robert L	5/14/18	\$ 6,000	\$ 12,000
38	Washburne Thomas	4/25/17	\$ 6,000	Washburne Thomas	5/3/18	\$ 4,000	\$ 10,000
39	Webb Stewart	4/12/17	\$ 6,000	Webb Stewart	4/12/18	\$ 6,000	\$ 12,000

The three columns on the left show 39 contributions to Jim Shea for Maryland in 2017 totaling \$232,429. Notice that 36 of these contributions were for the \$6000 maximum. The other three were for \$5000, \$5500 and \$5929 and were close to the legal limit, but weren't maxed-out yet.

Now look at the three columns to the right which show contributions *by the same 39 people* to People for Brandon Scott in April, May and June of 2018, just before the June 26 primary. It's reasonable to assume that, this close to the primary, the Shea campaign realized that it needed more money for television and other campaign marketing.

“So, why not just have these same Venable people contribute directly to Jim Shea for Maryland or to the Shea-Scott for Maryland Slate?”

Because doing so would have caused them to exceed the \$6000 legal limit for campaign contributions during a four-year election cycle. So, they gave the additional money the Shea campaign needed to Mayor Scott’s campaign committee.

And then the People for Brandon M. Scott committee contributed the money to the Shea-Scott for Maryland Slate committee. It could all be coincidental of course, but the optics are such that the subsequent contributions to the Slate committee by the Scott committee appear to be on behalf of the 39 Venable contributors who were already up against their \$6000 limits.

This next table shows one hundred percent of the contributions made to the Shea-Scott for Maryland Slate. As you can see, the slate had only thirteen receipts. There are some large contributions from Jim Shea’s campaign committee. And some small dollar refunds from The Campaign Group, a campaign marketing firm, all dated after the June 26 primary.

That leaves three transfers from People for Brandon M. Scott that I’ve highlighted, all of them in June 2018 before the primary. What you’re seeing is money, contributions made by the 39 Venable other contributors that was not spent by the Mayor’s campaign committee, but were subsequently transferred to the Shea-Scott for Maryland Slate. Forwarding those funds had the effect – intentionally or not – of allowing those contributors to circumvent state election law limiting individual campaign contributions to \$6000 per election cycle. Figuratively speaking, we’re talking about the completely legal laundering of campaign contributions that would otherwise exceed the statutory limit.

Technically, there’s nothing wrong about what I’m describing. It’s just proof of yet another shortcoming, another loophole in our laws which are intended to keep the influence of money on our elections within limits the Legislature considers reasonable.

Complete History of Contributions Received by Shea-Scott for Maryland Slate				
Source... Maryland Board of Elections Website				
	Date	Contributor	Address	Amount
1	5/9/2018	Shea Jim For Maryland	1010 Wagner Road Towson MD 21204	\$ 100
2	5/18/2018	Shea Jim For Maryland	1010 Wagner Road Towson MD 21204	\$ 400,000
3	6/1/2018	Scott Brandon M. People for	233 East Redwood Baltimore MD 21202-	\$ 250,000
4	5/30/2018	Shea Jim For Maryland	1010 Wagner Road Towson MD 21204	\$ 250,000
5	6/8/2018	Shea Jim For Maryland	1010 Wagner Road Towson MD 21204	\$ 350,000
6	6/12/2018	Scott Brandon M. People for	233 East Redwood Baltimore MD 21202-	\$ 200,000
7	6/26/2018	Shea Jim For Maryland	1010 Wagner Road Towson MD 21204	\$ 25,000
8	6/20/2018	Scott Brandon M. People for	233 East Redwood Baltimore MD 21202-	\$ 35,000
9	7/2/2018	Shea Jim For Maryland	1010 Wagner Road Towson MD 21204	\$ 6,600
10	10/10/2018	The Campaign Group	1600 Locust St Philadelphia PA 19103	\$ 2,591
11	8/27/2018	The Campaign Group	1600 Locust St Philadelphia PA 19103	\$ 170
12	10/5/2018	The Campaign Group	1600 Locust St Philadelphia PA 19103	\$ 14,192
13	11/5/2018	The Campaign Group	1600 Locust St Philadelphia PA 19103	\$ 1,402

Here's [a very helpful chart](#), published by the Maryland Board of Elections, that shows "Contributions and Transfer Limits."

CONTRIBUTIONS AND TRANSFERS LIMITS CHART

Donors \ Recipients	Candidate Committee	Political Action Committee (PAC) ¹⁹	Slate Committee	Party Central Committee- State	Party Central Committee- Local	Ballot Issue Committee- State & Local	Legislative Party Caucus Committee
Individual/ Business Entity/ Union/ Political Club ²⁰	\$6,000	\$6,000	\$6,000	\$6,000 ²¹	\$6,000	Unlimited	\$6,000 ²²
Authorized Candidate Campaign Committee	\$6,000	\$6,000	Unlimited ²³	\$6,000 ²⁴	\$6,000 ²⁵	Unlimited	Unlimited or \$6,000 ²⁶
PAC	\$6,000	\$6,000	\$6,000	\$6,000	\$6,000	Unlimited	\$6,000
Slate Committee	\$24,000 ²⁷	\$6,000	\$6,000	\$6,000	\$6,000	Unlimited	\$6,000
Party Central Committee- State	\$6,000 ²⁸	\$6,000	\$6,000	N/A	Unlimited	Unlimited	\$6,000
Party Central Committee-Local	\$6,000 ²⁹	\$6,000	\$6,000	Unlimited	Unlimited	Unlimited	\$6,000
Ballot Issue Committee- State & Local	\$6,000	\$6,000	\$6,000	\$6,000	\$6,000	Unlimited	\$6,000
Legislative Party Caucus Committees	\$24,000	\$6,000	\$6,000	\$6,000	\$6,000	Unlimited	\$6,000

Notice that individual "Donors" are limited to contributing \$6000 to all "Recipients" except ballot issue committees, while contributions by individual candidate campaign committees to slate committees are *unlimited*. And now you have a likely reason why individual campaign contributions to the Shea campaign – in excess of the \$6000 limit – were directed through Mayor Scott's campaign committee. It's because the Scott committee could contribute any amount of money, however large or often, to a slate

committee, no questions asked – even if that large transfer was funded by any number of smaller campaign contributions by individuals or companies.

One other thing... Go back to the table showing contributions to the Shea-Scott for Maryland slate. Note again the three contributions from People for Brandon M. Scott in the amounts of \$250,000 on June 1, \$200,000 on June 12 and another \$35,000 on June 20. Let's see if we can confirm the sources of those funds.

The [complete campaign finance reports](#) to which I am going to refer are all accessible through the Maryland Board of Elections website.

The June 1 \$250,000 – a substantial portion of which came from individual Venable contributions – was listed as a “Transfers Out” on page 7 of the People for Brandon M. Scott campaign finance report for the period May 16 through June 10. It's included in the total \$253,000 that you can see below in Part 3 of the committee's filing.



Maryland State Board of Elections

Name of Entity : Scott, Brandon M. People for
Filing Period Name : 06/10/2018 Pre-Primary2 Gubernatorial

Entity Number : 01007304
Report Due Date : 06/15/2018

Campaign Finance Report Summary Sheet

Part 1

Transaction Period → This Report covers transactions beginning 05/16/2018 and ending 06/10/2018.
Date Date

- ☐ Final Report (Check if you intend to close the account. This cannot be a final report if a cash balance or outstanding obligation remains)
☐ Amendment # _____ (Date amendment is being filed _____.)

Part 2

Electoral

Bank Account Name	Bank Account Number	Bank Account Balance*
*As of the report transaction ending date.		\$45,867.05
Total		

Part 3

Receipts

Contributions – Schd 1, Col A	\$45,535.00
Ticket Purchases – Schd 1, Col B	\$0.00
Federal Committees – Schd 1, Col C	\$0.00
Political Clubs – Schd 1, Col D	\$0.00
MD Candidate and Slate Accounts – Schd 1A, Col E	\$0.00
MD Party Central Committees – Schd 1A, Col F	\$0.00
MD Political Action Committees – Schd 1A, Col G	\$0.00
Non-Federal Out-of-State Committees – Schd 1A, Col H	\$0.00
Other – Schd 1B, Col I	\$0.00
Loans – Schd 3, Col K	\$0.00

Enter Total in Part 4 (Total Receipts)

Expenditures

Salaries & Other Compensation – Schd 2, Col N	\$0.00
Rent & Other Office Expenses – Schd 2, Col O	\$0.00
Field Expenses – Schd 2, Col P	\$1,000.00
Media – Schd 2, Col Q	\$0.00
Printing & Campaign Materials – Schd 2, Col R	\$0.00
Direct Mailing by Mail House – Schd 2, Col S	\$0.00
Postage – Schd 2, Col T	\$0.00
Purchase of Equipment – Schd 2, Col U	\$0.00
Fundraising Expenses – Schd 2, Col V	\$606.75
Transfers Out – Schd 2, Col W	\$253,000.00
Loan Repayment – Schd 2, Col X	\$0.00
Other – Schd 2, Col Y	\$1,500.00
Returned Contribution – Schd 2, Col Z	\$0.00

Enter Total in Part 4 (Total Expenditures)

The June 20 \$35,000 is confirmed on page 4 of the People for Brandon M. Scott campaign finance report for the period June 11 through August 21, 2018 where it was classified as "Field Expenses" in the \$38,100 showing in Part 3 of the committee's filing.



Maryland State Board of Elections

Name of Entity : Scott, Brandon M. People for
Filing Period Name : 08/21/2018 Pre-General1 Report Gubernatorial

Entity Number : 01007304
Report Due Date : 08/28/2018

Campaign Finance Report Summary Sheet

Part 1

Transaction Period → This Report covers transactions beginning 06/11/2018 and ending 08/21/2018.
Date Date

- ☐ Final Report (Check if you intend to close the account. This cannot be a final report if a cash balance or outstanding obligation remains)
☒ Amendment # 1 (Date amendment is being filed 07/21/2019.)

Part 2

Electoral

Bank Account Name	Bank Account Number	Bank Account Balance*
*As of the report transaction ending date. Total		\$32,857.21

Part 3

Receipts

Contributions – Schd 1, Col A	\$31,750.00
Ticket Purchases – Schd 1, Col B	\$0.00
Federal Committees – Schd 1, Col C	\$0.00
Political Clubs – Schd 1, Col D	\$0.00
MD Candidate and Slate Accounts – Schd 1A, Col E	\$0.00
MD Party Central Committees – Schd 1A, Col F	\$0.00
MD Political Action Committees – Schd 1A, Col G	\$0.00
Non-Federal Out-of-State Committees – Schd 1A, Col H	\$0.00
Other – Schd 1B, Col I	\$0.00
Loans – Schd 3, Col K	\$0.00

Enter Total in Part 4 (Total Receipts)

Expenditures

Salaries & Other Compensation – Schd 2, Col N	\$0.00
Rent & Other Office Expenses – Schd 2, Col O	\$0.00
Field Expenses – Schd 2, Col P	\$38,100.00
Media – Schd 2, Col Q	\$0.00
Printing & Campaign Materials – Schd 2, Col R	\$0.00
Direct Mailing by Mail House – Schd 2, Col S	\$0.00
Postage – Schd 2, Col T	\$0.00
Purchase of Equipment – Schd 2, Col U	\$0.00
Fundraising Expenses – Schd 2, Col V	\$3,490.62
Transfers Out – Schd 2, Col W	\$0.00
Loan Repayment – Schd 2, Col X	\$0.00
Other – Schd 2, Col Y	\$870.16
Returned Contribution – Schd 2, Col Z	\$0.00

Enter Total in Part 4 (Total Expenditures)

Unfortunately, the same report for June 11 through August 21, 2018 makes no mention of the \$200,000, dated June 12, 2018 that is showing on the Shea-Scott for Maryland Slate list of contributions received – not as "Field Expenses" or "Transfers Out" or anywhere else on the People for Brandon M. Scott report. Nor was there enough money on hand – only \$32,857 – to cover the \$200,000 transfer.

"It's probably just an innocent clerical error."

Of course, but the question is, why didn't the Board of Elections computer pick it up and require that either the Scott or Shea-Scott Slate committee amend its filing? From where, exactly, did the \$200,000 come from? If it did come from the People for Brandon M. Scott committee, where did the Scott committee get the money to fund that transfer?

At the very least, if the Legislature is serious about campaign financing reform, there is an urgent need for a very significant increase in funding for the Board of Elections, with special instructions to improve computerized analysis of campaign contributions and expenditures.

-Les Cohen

Les Cohen is a long-term Marylander, having grown up in Annapolis. Professionally, he writes and edits materials for business and political clients from his base of operations in Columbia, Maryland. He has a Ph.D. in Urban and Regional Economics. Leave a comment or feel free to send him an email to Les@Writeaway.us.

