



BUSINESS

Billionaire Adelson Under Fire For Macau Dealings

JULY 16, 2012 · 3:00 PM ET

HEARD ON ALL THINGS CONSIDERED

6-Minute Listen

[PLAYLIST](#)

[TRANSCRIPT](#)

Robert Siegel talks to Lowell Bergman about a *ProPublica* investigation into billionaire and Republican political contributor Sheldon Adelson. There are concerns that Adelson may have violated the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act in his payments to a Macau lawyer who represented his firm's interests in the booming gambling capital. Bergman co-reported the story with Stephen Engelberg and Matt Isaacs for the Investigative Reporting Program of the University of California at Berkeley and *PBS Frontline*.

Sponsor Message

AUDIE CORNISH, HOST:

It's ALL THINGS CONSIDERED from NPR News. I'm Audie Cornish.

ROBERT SIEGEL, HOST:

And I'm Robert Siegel.

The independent investigative nonprofit, ProPublica, reports today on the federal investigation into Sands China Limited. That's the Macau operation of Las Vegas Sands. The big hotel and casino company is controlled by billionaire and multimillion dollar Republican political contributor Sheldon Adelson.

According to the story, which is by Lowell Bergman, Matt Isaacs and Steve Engelberg, federal investigators are looking at whether payments the company made to a Macau lawyer, who is also a local legislator, violate the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act. That law makes it illegal for an American company to pay a foreign official to affect or influence any act or decision of that official in his official capacity.

The story also cites company emails and other documents which show that concerns were raised within Adelson's own company about payments to the Macau lawyer.

Lowell Bergman joins us now from New York. Welcome to the program once again.

LOWELL BERGMAN: Thanks for having me.

SIEGEL: First, who was this Macau lawyer named Leonel Alberto Alves?

BERGMAN: Well, he is Macau lawyer who also still to today is the out-of-house attorney for Sands China, the subsidiary of Las Vegas Sands. He holds the three political positions in China: one with a national consultant of Congress, another as a legislator, and another as part of the inner circle or the executive advisory board of the chief executive of Macau. At the same time, he's an attorney, so in that

capacity he represents them in a number of outside issues including discussions with the government.

SIEGEL: Can you tell, from the Sands documents that you've seen, how much Mr. Alves was paid and what he was paid for doing?

BERGMAN: Well, we have documents that show at least five to \$600,000 in U.S. in payments for what looks like a four-month period. And we have one document that says that in total it comes to approximately \$700,000. Now, the figure for someone like Mr. Adelson, who's estimated to have \$25 billion in net worth, is not a large figure. But it was much larger than what he was supposed to be paid according to the internal emails.

And because of that, the most significant part of the documents that we have, the general counsel of Las Vegas Sands based in Nevada wrote an email saying this runs the risk of violating the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act.

SIEGEL: Now you're talking about, I guess, Al Gonzalez is the general counsel?

BERGMAN: Right, his full name is J. Alberto Gonzales-Pita.

SIEGEL: Question about the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, the FCPA, and the relationship between Sheldon Adelson's company and this lawyer from Macau. If Mr. Alves was both a lawyer and a local council member and held two other positions in China, does the act in fact permit someone to pay him if it is not in his official capacity? If he's got a law firm, can you say, look, I represented him in his other private capacity, not in his official capacity?

BERGMAN: It does allow for that and there are instances of that happening. And in some of the people we quote in the story, and others we consulted, the description goes something like this. If you're going to hire a public official to work for you as an attorney, for instance, in another country outside of whatever your immediate business is – so he's not directly dealing with his counterparts in the government. And say he's an expert on bankruptcy law, that's fine.

And usually what the government likes, the federal government likes, they like to have an arrangement where the company makes it clear what the limits are in

what this person is going to do and how they're going to get paid, et cetera.

In this case, to date at least, and in the documents we've seen in reporting we've done, we know of no attempt by the company to do that. That is, for Las Vegas Sands to have some transparency with the federal government about their attempts to hire a public official to work for them.

SIEGEL: Is Las Vegas Sands obliged to tell the federal government every payment it's making to every lawyer in every country it operates?

BERGMAN: Under the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act it is obligated to keep complete and accurate books, so that they would have to report that. It would be accessible initially by the SEC.

SIEGEL: I think our image of bribes paid by American companies are all about, you know, suitcases filled with stacks of hundred dollar bills that are being delivered somewhat surreptitiously. This is retaining a lawyer. This is - he invoices the company for money and he's paid the money. Is that the same thing?

BERGMAN: I mean, we don't know whether any bribes were paid here. All we know and all we are reporting on is the state of the investigation. And there are certain parts of that investigation that appear to be curious. For example, an email that Alves sends - which was never acted upon, but suggesting that \$300 million be paid in order to settle both a administrative sort of legal dispute that the company was having with the government, as well as outside litigation. That didn't go through.

But when you see an email like that, your eyes widen and you wonder how could he be making such a proposal? So there's smoke here and that seems to be what the government is after - is whether there is a fire behind it.

SIEGEL: How big a chunk of Sands business nowadays does Macau represent? Do we know?

BERGMAN: We know it's at least two-thirds of their income. And that's true of almost all the U.S. publicly traded gaming companies that are operating in Macau. It is the mother lode for gaming operations internationally.

SIEGEL: Lowell Bergman of ProPublica, thank you.

BERGMAN: Thank you.

SIEGEL: Lowell Bergman of the Investigative Reporting Program at the University of California, Berkeley and also PBS's "Frontline." He's been talking with us about the investigation into Sands China Limited. The story he co-reported was published today on the Web site ProPublica. For its part, Las Vegas Sands denies any wrongdoing.

Copyright © 2012 NPR. All rights reserved. Visit our website terms of use and permissions pages at www.npr.org for further information.

Accuracy and availability of NPR transcripts may vary. Transcript text may be revised to correct errors or match updates to audio. Audio on npr.org may be edited after its original broadcast or publication. The authoritative record of NPR's programming is the audio record.



The Indicator — now in your inbox

What's driving the economy, what's changing your life, and what caught our eye when the mics were off. Sent weekly.

SIGN UP

[See more subscription options](#)

By subscribing, you acknowledge and agree to NPR's [Terms of Use](#) and [Privacy Policy](#).
NPR may share your name and email address with your NPR station. [See Details](#).

More Stories From NPR



NATIONAL

California chemical tank has cracked, causing state of emergency, thousands to evacuate



IT'S BEEN A MINUTE

Christians are having a Trump-sized reckoning : It's Been a Minute



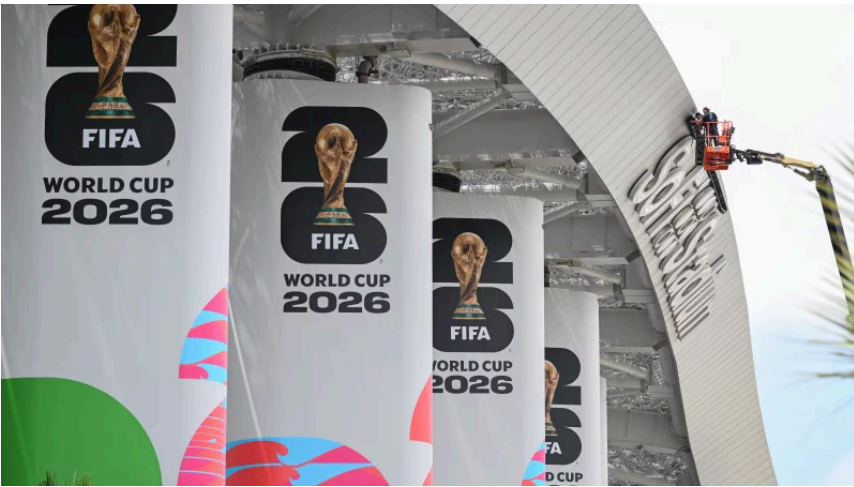
TECHNOLOGY

The theory taking the rich by storm: China funds data center haters



EDUCATION

July 1 brings big student loan changes. Here's what you need to know



The World Cup is starting. Here's what to know and how to watch



Takeaways from Iowa's primaries. And, DOJ nixes Trump's 'anti-weaponization' fund

Popular on NPR.org



TECHNOLOGY

The theory taking the rich by storm: China funds data center haters



SOCCER EDITION

The World Cup is starting. Here's what to know and how to watch



EDUCATION

July 1 brings big student loan changes. Here's what you need to know



NATIONAL

Veterans and relatives see no place for Trump's arch near Arlington National Cemetery



NATIONAL

Bill Gates tells lawmakers he was not aware of Epstein's crimes



IMMIGRATION

Report: ICE wasted millions, endangered detainees in largest immigration facility

NPR Editors' Picks



MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT

U.S. military says it's striking 'multiple targets' in Iran in 2nd day of renewed fire



SOCCER EDITION

Somali World Cup referee denied U.S. entry, hailed as hero at home



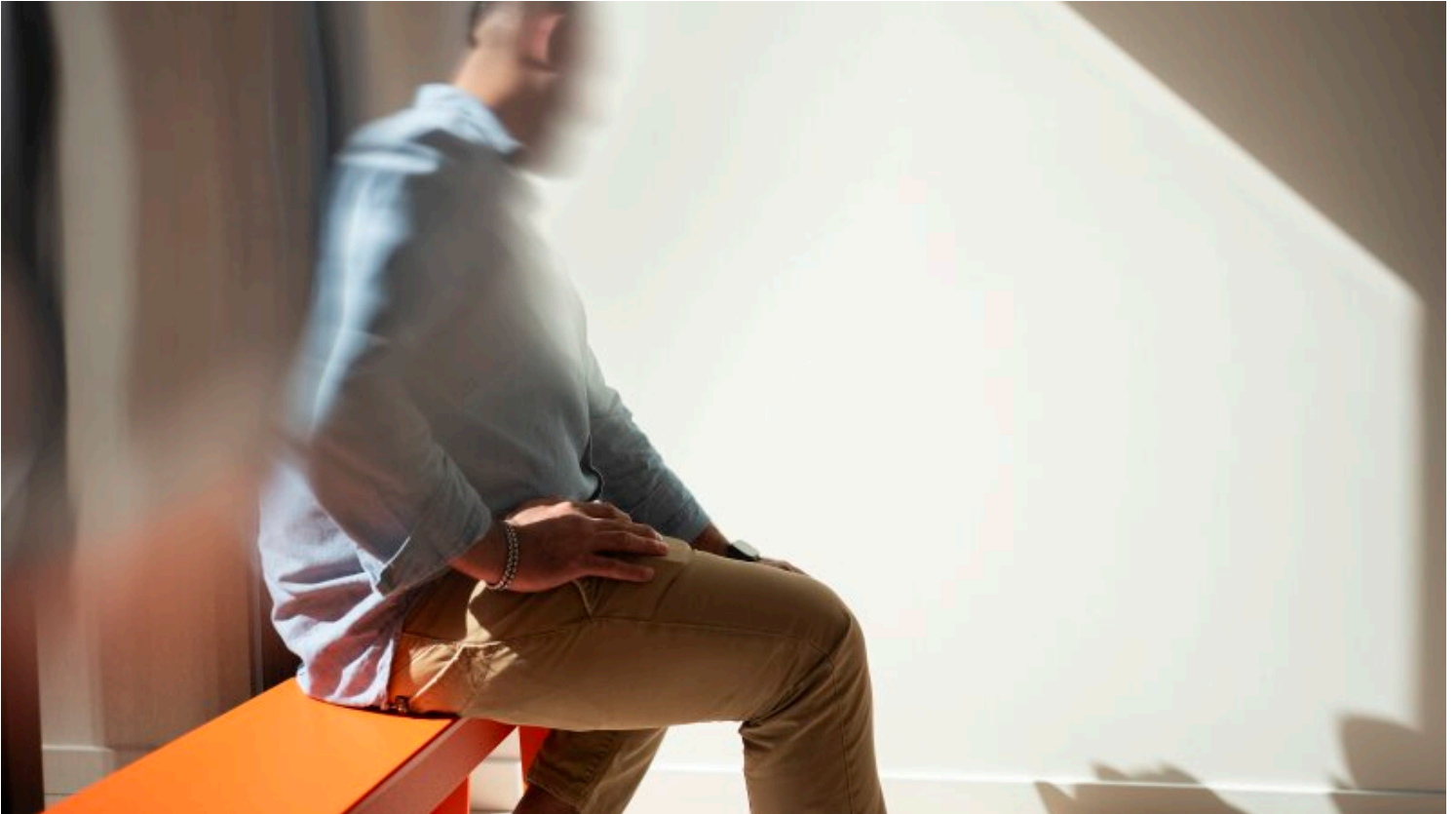
WORLD, REORDERING

China re-centers North Korea ties as nuclear silence reshapes balance



POLITICS

ICE denies having a protester database. But a letter to Congress sheds more light



IMMIGRATION

San Francisco immigration court shuts down, striking at heart of historic advocacy



MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT

Israeli leader who pulled out of Lebanon warns against getting stuck again

READ & LISTEN

Home

News

Culture

Music

Podcasts & Shows

CONNECT

Newsletters

Facebook

Instagram

Press

Public Editor

Corrections

Transcripts

Contact & Help

ABOUT NPR

Overview

Diversity

NPR Network

Accessibility

Ethics

Finances

GET INVOLVED

Support Public Radio

Sponsor NPR

NPR Careers

NPR Shop

NPR Extra

terms of use

privacy

your privacy choices

text only

