
FILLON HIT BY NEW ALLEGATION OF UNDECLARED LOAN AS HE SEEKS TO REVIVE FRENCH PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

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Satirical weekly "Le Canard Enchaîné" on Tuesday alleged that scandal-hit conservative presidential candidate Francois Fillon had not properly declared a 50,000 euro (\$53,000) interest-free loan from a billionaire friend.

"Tomorrow in 'The Canard': A loan of [REDACTED] from Ladreit de Lacharriere was not declared by the MP Fillon," the investigative and satirical publication tweeted on Tuesday.

The same newspaper broke the story in January that 63-year-old Fillon had allegedly paid his wife Penelope and two of their five children more than a million euros (\$1.1 million) in public funds over several years for "fake jobs," namely administrative work as parliamentary aides which judicial officials suspect they did not do. On March 15 he is due to be questioned by investigators and risks facing charges.

The new allegation dates back to 2013, when Fillon "did not deem it necessary" to report the loan from Marc Ladreit de Lacharriere to a state transparency watchdog, "Le Canard Enchaîné" reported. "The 'oversight' may be costly for the presidential candidate," it added.

France's Fillon clings to presidential race

The publication quoted Fillon's lawyer Antonin Levy as saying the loan had been repaid in full, but he did not say when.

One of France's wealthiest people

Ladreit de Lacharriere is the CEO of financial services holding company Finalac. On the "Forbes" list of the world's wealthy he was ranked 722nd in 2016 and according to "Forbes" current website he has a net worth of \$2.9 billion.

He also owns the literary magazine "Le Revue des Deux Mondes," which paid Penelope Fillon about 100,000 euros in 2012-2013, but there's little evidence of work she did. Investigators are looking into whether the job played a role in Ladreit de Lacharriere being bestowed France's highest civilian honor in 2012 when Francois Fillon was prime minister.

Fillon, the surprise winner of the conservative primaries in November, was once billed as the favorite to enter the Elysee Palace following elections in April and a likely runoff in May. The scandal has threatened to derail his campaign, with both far-right candidate Marine Le Pen of the

National Front and independent centrist Emmanuel Macron overtaking him in recent polls.

Fillon calls on centrist allies for support

The new revelations come at a time when Fillon is looking to revive his embattled campaign. In a speech Tuesday night he appealed to centrist allies who had rejected him over the corruption allegations to back him again.

"We have the same values, the same goals and it is together that we can build a government majority to rebuild France," Fillon told a gathering of UDI party members in Orleans, south of Paris. "We're all patriots, so let's serve the homeland."

The executive committee of the UDI later issued a statement in response, Reuters reported:

"We take note of Francois Fillion's * decision to continue his campaign and his pledge to take initiatives to bridge divisions with the UDI... We are waiting to see those initiatives."

On Monday Fillon's party, The Republicans, announced it would keep backing him following several days of uncertainty about whether he had enough support to continue. Fellow conservative Alian Juppe rejected calls to take Fillon's place as the candidate, while at the same time lamenting the state of Fillon's presidential bid, calling it a "waste."

Kaynak/Source: