

Vinod Gupta: Bill & Hillary Clinton's good friend back in the role of serial entrepreneur

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For Indian American serial entrepreneur Vinod Gupta, political connections are now on the top of his 'don't-do' list. Gupta, who has been known for his close links with Bill and Hillary Clinton and was even hired as a consultant to the former US president after he left the White House in January 2001, now says that political donations are the easiest way to lose friends.

The former top aide of Bill Clinton should know, considering that he was forced to step down as chairman of infoUSA - a company he himself had created - after he came under a cloud on grounds of "improper company expenditure", which included spending on Clintons and on things such as luxury yachts and jets. The leveraged buy-out of InfoGroup Inc last year, by private equity firm CCMP for \$460 mn, benefited Gupta and his family, who were the biggest shareholders.

But Vin Gupta, the name that he's usually known by, has moved on. "The lawsuits related to infoUSA have been settled and I'm excited about my new companies. All of them build up on the domain knowledge that we have from infoUSA on databases for sales people," says Gupta.

The new companies that he has set up since he was forced to move out of infoUSA are expresscopy.com, that offers online digital printing services; Database 101, a company that offers databases and technology to sales people and small businesses and the latest infofree.com, which is launching a service for salespeople, small businesses and entrepreneurs. Gupta's private equity firm, Everest Group LLC, is focussed on investments in the business information and marketing information sectors.

"I've already invested around \$20 million in the new ventures. We're now setting up a back office in Noida for all our ventures. We will start India operations in August and will employ 100 people in India. Later, we plan to expand and create more jobs in India," says Gupta.

Giving Back to IIT

Personally, he has shifted base from Omaha, Nebraska, where infoUSA was headquartered, to Las Vegas. "I like living in Vegas because of the quality of life it offers. Besides Nevada is a pro-business state and welcomes investments," says Gupta, a millionaire who is known for his luxurious lifestyle.

As for the investment environment in Silicon Valley, Gupta feels that the tech entrepreneurs now are a smarter lot than they were before the recession era. "The younger generation of entrepreneurs of Indian-origin are smarter with their money and I find that adversity has made people more creative in the Valley," he says.

Gupta, who first made it fashionable among the IIT alumni to give back to their alma mater, is now looking at setting up a school for entrepreneurship at his alma mater IIT-Kharagpur. "A school for medical technology is also a big need within the IIT system as the demand grows in the healthcare sector. Besides, there is no reason why education at the premier IITs cannot in some way tie up with liberal arts as well," says Gupta.

He was the first IITian to donate \$2 million to start Vinod Gupta School of Management at IIT-KGP. He later donated a million dollars more to set up the Rajiv Gandhi School of Intellectual Property Law also at IIT-KGP.

A wildlife enthusiast, Gupta inspired Clinton to visit Ranthambhore Tiger Reserve during his presidential visit to India. He is involved in a big way with wildlife conservation and saving the Royal Bengal tiger. "There are now less than 1,200 tigers in the wilds in India. Efforts to save the tiger could actually help create jobs around major wildlife parks. Like the West, high net worth Indians should be encouraged to adopt parks and contribute towards saving the tiger," says Gupta. He has also put in funds for various activities at Ranthambhore

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