



Tracking the Dirty Dollars: Givers to and Takers in California's Legislature

A reality of California politics is that it costs money to pay for political campaigns in such a populous state. It costs money to hire campaign managers, hire communications firms, buy political ads, and send political mailers. As a result, in Sacramento, legislators and statewide elected officials are regularly asking for and receiving funds from donors.

It is through campaign donations, independent expenditure campaigns, and direct gifts that both individuals and special interests, including polluting industries, help elected officials achieve their ambitions. And it's how many interest groups representing or aligned with polluting interests maintain access to decision makers. Access often translates into votes in an industry group's favor.

Beginning with this report, Sierra Club California is launching a year-long survey of certain special interest spending to legislators. Specifically, we investigate and disclose how much money certain legislators and the governor receive in campaign contributions from the fossil fuel industry and its political allies.

Candidates running for statewide office are required to report all donations to the Secretary of State on a regular basis. Campaign finance laws require that this information be made available to the public to ensure that constituents know who paid to help elect their representatives. We used this publicly available information to compile this report.

This report focuses on only 31 elected officials (mostly legislators) and 91 donors who are associated with the oil and methane gas industries. This is the first edition of this report and we plan to release updates quarterly. Later editions will likely be expanded to include more policymakers and more environmentally unfriendly donors.

Why this Report is Necessary

If legislative advocacy were a fair fight, the environmental advocates would nearly always win. Polling and actions demonstrate that Californians support regulation and laws that deliver clean air, clean water, protected wildlands, public parks, protected wildlife, and assertive policies to cut climate pollution. So if legislators were consistently representing the best interests of their constituents, environmental policy would win.

The legislative process would be about refining good bills to ensure that they benefit most Californians and do not have unintended consequences. Instead, under the current system, environmental advocates spend too much time struggling to pass marginally good bills and fighting to kill horrifically bad bills.

The oil and methane gas industries -- along with industries and labor groups that benefit from their polluting practices -- have an outsized influence in the Capitol. They not only can hire more lobbyists with their wealth, they can provide large donations to buy expensive tickets to breakfasts, lunches, dinners, receptions and golf tournaments designed to bring in the bucks for legislators' campaigns. Now, during a time of COVID, those fundraising events haven't stopped -- they've just gone virtual.

We have become increasingly frustrated at how difficult it is to advance pro-environment legislation through a legislature with Democratic super majorities in both houses. We have been similarly disheartened by how difficult it is to stop polluter-friendly bills. This report is our effort to shed some light on why this difficulty exists even when a party whose platform supports environmental action has a clear vote advantage. Simply put, the evidence shows that polluting interests are spending a lot to control who gets elected, to gain premium access to those electeds, and then to direct how those elected officials vote.

Perhaps worse, though, most of this spending goes unnoticed by the average person. It takes time and effort to monitor and wade through expenditure reports. It is our hope that the data we present in our spreadsheets will make it easier for others to track how the money and influence flows.

How We Put this Report Together

The Secretary of State's website (sos.ca.gov) has a powerful tool to investigate elected officials' campaign contributions. We used the aptly named "Power Search" tool to collect the vast majority of the data in this report.

For each elected leader, we downloaded a spreadsheet with all of their reported donations from 2019 and through November 20, 2020. Then, we filtered out all the donors that were not included on our dirty donor list. This process left us with only the donations each leader received from the donors we selected. The result of our efforts are displayed on each leaders' spreadsheet.

Senator Ben Hueso had very few donations for statewide office because he was running for the San Diego County Board of Supervisors. To create his table, we sifted through his campaign's contribution documents on the San Diego County Registrar's website to find which dirty donors contributed to his Board of Supervisors campaign.

The Secretary of State's website also features a Power Search tool for independent expenditures. Independent expenditures are funds spent on an independent campaign in support of or against a candidate's campaign. The independent expenditure campaign is required by law to operate without communication with the candidate's campaign. Independent expenditure campaigns most commonly are used by an industry or interest group to produce mailers and advertising to support or oppose a candidate. On occasion, environmental groups have used independent expenditure campaigns, but they are overwhelmingly most often used by industry interests, particularly the oil and gas industry.

Using the Power Search tool, we downloaded the independent expenditures and noted any polluter or polluter-adjacent expenditure in support of an elected leader on the leader's spreadsheet page.

Finally, we browsed dozens of documents on CalAccess which report gifts -- often in the form of food, drink or spa treatment -- from monied interests to elected leaders. If we found any gifts from polluters or polluter-adjacent entities, we reported them on the appropriate elected leader's spreadsheet.

Why We Chose these Donors: The Three Ps

The donors we selected fit into one of three categories:

1. **Polluters:** These are companies or groups whose members are directly responsible for refining, extracting or burning fossil fuels;
2. **Polluter-Adjacent:** These are companies or interest groups who benefit from the use of fossil fuels and have actively worked against legislation that would contain fossil fuels or their byproducts; or
3. **PAC:** A Political Action Committee (PAC) pools campaign contributions from various like-minded interests and then donates to candidates or independent expenditure campaigns or directly on independent campaign activity (such as mailers).

For example, Chevron, Exxon Mobil and Sempra (which owns SoCal Gas) are all directly responsible for refining, extracting and/or burning fossil fuels. They are some of the polluters featured on our donor list.

Dart Container, a plastics manufacturer, is polluter-adjacent as it uses petroleum to create its products. Two labor organizations -- Pipe Trades Council and the State Building and Construction Trades Council -- are also polluter-adjacent as they both rely on fossil fuels for jobs and employ lobbyists who have been effective advocates on behalf of the fossil fuels industry to kill environmental legislation. BNSF railway transports fossil fuels and therefore is also among those analyzed as polluter adjacent.

The PACs we included were selected because they received substantial amounts of money from polluter or polluter-adjacent contributors. The PACs sheet on our document shows from which contributors on our donor list the PACs received money.

Why We Chose These Leaders

The legislators on this list are mostly individuals whose votes we have struggled to secure on environmental- and health-protective legislation. Many of the legislators we selected perennially score very poorly on our legislative report card. Others score relatively high, but our advocates often must spend substantial time and energy attempting to convince them to take pro-environment votes.

We chose all Democrats for the first edition of this report. All of the legislators in this report are members of a political party that recognizes the severity of the climate crisis and the fossil fuel industry's role in perpetuating it. And since the Democrats hold a super majority in both houses, members of that party are usually enough to make or break an environmental policy bill.

Despite their party affiliation, some moderate Democrats have chosen to vote against the environment often enough that we became curious about what may be influencing their judgement. We focused mostly on those legislators in this report to see if dirty donor money may have something to do with their voting behavior.

We also included Governor Gavin Newsom, Senate President Pro Tem Toni Atkins and Assembly Speaker Anthony Rendon in this report because they are in leadership positions and they have an outsized role in determining the fate of legislation.

What We Learned

For a detailed look at which dirty donors are funding each leader's campaign, simply flip through the spreadsheets of this report.

Broadly, the results of this report were not at all surprising. The legislators with the worst scores on our report card and who are often hostile towards Sierra Club and other environmental advocates receive substantial amounts of campaign cash from dirty donors.

Assemblymembers Jim Cooper, Tom Daly and Patrick O'Donnell lead all legislators in taking fossil-fuel related money. These three all received more than \$100,000 in donations from oil and gas companies, associated PACs and allied interests. All three received failing grades on our 2020 report card.

In the second tier of dirty money recipients are Assemblymembers Autumn Burke and James Ramos and Governor Gavin Newsom. These leaders all received more than \$90,000 in donations from the targeted interests. While their report card scores are mixed, their pro-environment votes (or signatures and vetoes) are notoriously difficult to secure.

An honorable mention should be bestowed upon Assemblymember Wendy Carrillo. A CalAccess search into the Western State Petroleum Association's expenditures revealed that Asm. Carrillo was the beneficiary of a \$1,500 stay at the Ritz Carlton Half Moon Bay in 2019 and a \$200 spa treatment to boot. All this on the state's most powerful oil peddlers' dime.

The rest of the legislators whose donations we analyzed are not off the hook. Most received substantial contributions from oil and gas and their allies and received dismal scores on our latest report card. Below is an overview of each leader, their 2019 and 2020 report card scores and the amount in contributions their campaigns received from dirty donors:

Leader	2019 Report Card Score	2020 Report Card Score	Dirty Donor Contributions
Asm. Cecilia Aguiar-Curry	73%	33%	\$51,800.00
Asm. Joaquin Arambula	64%	11%	\$58,950.00
Asm. Autumn Burke	90%	44%	\$99,400.00
Asm. Wendy Carrillo	100%	56%	\$31,400.00
Asm. Ken Cooley	80%	56%	\$55,900.00
Asm. Jim Cooper	40%	11%	\$130,450.00
Asm. Tom Daly	55%	11%	\$101,400.00
Asm. Jim Frazier	64%	25%	\$85,500.00
Asm. Mike Gipson	73%	22%	\$87,103.58
Asm. Adam Gray	18%	22%	\$58,500.00
Asm. Tim Grayson	82%	11%	\$84,500.00
Asm. Jacqui Irwin	82%	56%	\$21,700.00
Asm. Evan Low	100%	44%	\$71,400.00
Asm. Patrick O'Donnell	73%	44%	\$145,350.27
Asm. Bill Quirk	100%	67%	\$71,900.00
Asm. Sharon Quirk-Silva	55%	22%	\$47,700.00
Asm. James Ramos	73%	22%	\$95,600.00
Asm. Freddie Rodriguez	64%	44%	\$74,200.00
Asm. Blanca Rubio	45%	22%	\$70,700.00

Asm. Rudy Salas Jr.	27%	22%	\$67,500.00
Speaker Anthony Rendon	100%	63%	\$41,300.00
Sen. Bob Archuleta	83%	50%	\$47,950.00
Sen. Steven Bradford	75%	38%	\$45,700.00
Sen. Anna Caballero	75%	22%	\$12,550.00
Sen. Steve Glazer	92%	25%	\$46,900.00
Sen. Bob Hertzberg	92%	44%	\$70,500.00
Sen. Ben Hueso	75%	44%	\$88,500.00
Sen. Melissa Hurtado	67%	38%	\$46,200.00
Sen. Richard Pan	83%	38%	\$6,500.00
Sen. Susan Rubio	67%	38%	\$78,400.00
Pro Tem Toni Atkins	92%	63%	\$15,600.00
Gov. Gavin Newsom	80%	75%	\$97,000.00
Democratic Party	N/A	N/A	\$750,000.00
Republican Party	N/A	N/A	\$2,353,800.01

How the Read and Use the Data Sheet

The data sheets that are the heart of our report are presented as an excel workbook composed of many spreadsheets. The first spreadsheet is a title page, followed by a table of contents. The third spreadsheet is the list of donors whose contributions to legislators that we tracked. The list includes polluters, polluter-adjacent or polluter-backed Political Action Committees (PACs), collectively “dirty donors.”

The fourth spreadsheet outlines where the PACs we included received contributions from. The PACs run down the side and the donors are listed across the top. The table itself is filled in with the amounts of money the dirty donors gave to corresponding PACs.

Each of the fifth through thirty-fifth spreadsheets includes the contributions from dirty donors given to the campaigns of each of the legislators in this report. The third-to-last spreadsheet shows the contributions from dirty donors to the governor. The final two spreadsheets list contributions from dirty donors to the Democratic and Republican parties respectively.

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