



# **SPECIAL INTEREST BIG MONEY IN CALIFORNIA POLITICS**

*When you add up which side gets the most, the media's  
current narrative crumbles.*



May 2022

## **Executive Summary:**

***“Our Constitution doesn’t begin with the phrase ... ‘We the Donors.’” – President Joe Biden***

***“[E]nd dark money groups.” – President Joe Biden***

***“Democrats have consistently called for closing loopholes in campaign finance law that allow secret donors to bankroll pricey political ads.” – OpenSecrets***

For years, Democrats and their friends in the mainstream media have decried “Dark Money” and/or “Special Interest Money” influencing elections — supposedly, according to them, all in favor of Republicans.

Liberal groups repeatedly call for the repeal of the landmark Citizens United Supreme Court case that affirmed political speech was protected under the First Amendment. In running for President in 2020, Joe Biden’s campaign website said he pledged to “end Dark Money groups.”

But is this narrative really true? Certainly not in California — where Democrats have complete control of state politics.

The Transparency Foundation, a non-profit non-partisan group dedicated to shining a light on government corruption, has released a report on campaign funding sources in California alleging that liberal groups are in fact the guiltier party when it comes to special interest money.

The comprehensive report details the top 500 donors of key liberal and conservative campaigns in California, such as the California Democratic Party, California Republican Party, Newsom recall committees, and more. Data was sourced from the California Secretary of State’s record of public financial disclosures.

The Foundation defined, categorized, and analyzed special interest money from businesses, political action committees (PACs), unions, labor, education, and professional associations. These sources were determined to be special interests on the basis that they are not individuals and do not answer to individuals on how their money is appropriated; they are also traditionally more apt to engage in lobbying activities.

The verdict? The Transparency Foundation found that Democrat campaigns took in roughly \$43.4 million (or 619%) more special interest funding than Republican campaigns.

Additionally, Democrat campaigns took in more special interest money as a percentage of their overall funding than Republican campaigns, averaging 9.22% more.

### **CA Democrat Party, Top Officials, and Campaigns - Special Interest Money**

Total Contributions Analyzed: \$86,304,720.71

Special Interest Money from Corporations, PACs, Unions, Labor: \$50,398,885.39

Special Interest % of Total Contributions: 58.4%

### **CA Republican Party, Top Officials, and Campaigns - Special Interest Money**

Total Contributions Analyzed: \$14,257,716.96

Special Interest Money from Corporations, PACs, Unions, Labor: \$7,012,291.28

Special Interest % of Total Contributions: 49.18%

Carl DeMaio, chairman of the Transparency Foundation, says that the results unequivocally “refute the narrative that one side of the political spectrum is ‘pure’ of special interest funding and the other side is ‘contaminated’ by it.”

The Transparency Foundation’s analysis also showed the ultra-wealthy are giving to Democrats in California in larger numbers and greater contributions than Republicans.

For Republican campaigns, contributions from individuals in the top 500 donors averaged \$5,999.45. For Democrat campaigns, contributions from individuals in the top 500 donors averaged \$28,960.37 — 383% more dollars than Republican groups.

Liberal campaigns brought in, on average, more contributions from labor unions and professional associations. Conservative campaigns, on average, received more support from the business community than liberal efforts.

Additionally, housing, entertainment, and web browsing/social media companies tended to donate more to liberal funds, while oil and gas companies tended to favor contributing to conservative funds.

In conclusion, we rate the narrative that Republican campaigns are more awash in special interest money than Democrat campaigns — at least in California — as false.

### **Study Methodology:**

The campaign financial disclosures filed with the California Secretary of State for the year 2021 of top California political parties and their associated campaigns, funds, and efforts were reviewed for sources of contributions in order to track special interest funding.

Special interest money, as defined for our purposes, is funding that comes from the special interests of businesses, political action committees (PACs), unions, labor, education, and professional associations. Further, transfers into campaigns from another campaign could represent potential special interest money. This money is used to influence elections and policies.

Additionally, businesses, PACs, and unions are special interest money because these funds are not coming from individuals. Their donations offer members no direct voice for who receives their money. Also, if union members especially disagree with what their union is funding, many unions bar their members from leaving the union and taking their money elsewhere — holding them and their money hostage.

A sample of the top 500 donors, or, if less than 500 total donors for a campaign, the total number of donors, was taken for each campaign reviewed. A sample of 500 was chosen as a way to cut out small dollar donors from analysis — which is not a special interest segment. The individual donors that made it in the top 500 are generally wealthier, large contributors, such as CEOs and politicians.

Contribution sources were separated into four categories and analyzed: corporations, businesses, business and general political action committees (PACs); labor unions, associations, and their related PACs; related campaigns and issues PACs; individuals, trusts, and others.

The amount donated to a campaign by each category was broken out and analyzed for the amount raised and the top contributors.

Similar campaigns were compared directly in “Key Points” notes.

## **DATA SET: CALIFORNIA DEMOCRATIC PARTY**

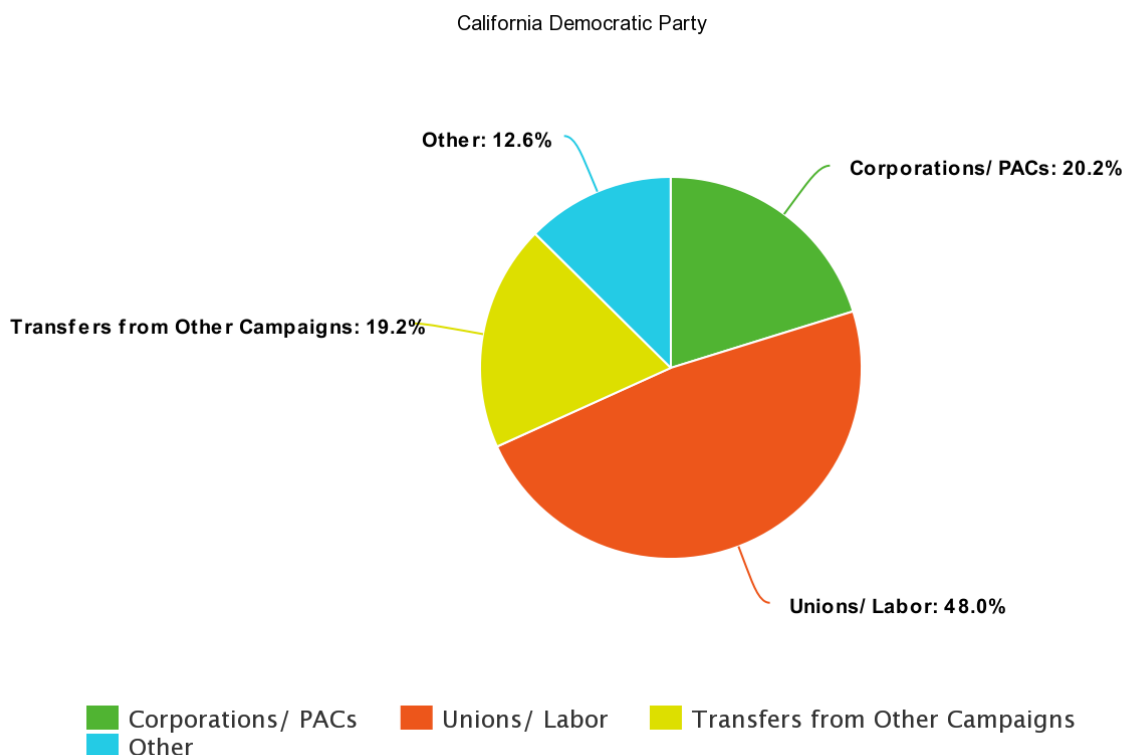
Total raised from top 500: \$24,125,276.69

Corporations/Business PACs/ Other PACs = 152, total raised \$4,879,667.76

Labor Unions/ Prof Associations/ Associated PACs = 176, total raised \$11,583,551.80

Transfer from another campaign = 101, total raised \$4,624,957.13

Individuals/ Trusts/ Other = 71, total raised \$3,037,100.00, average contribution \$42,776.05



**Top contributing businesses:** Anheuser-Busch Companies, Inc.; Blue Shield Of California; At&T Services Inc. And Its Affiliates; Amazon.Com Services Llc(Jeffrey Bezos); Amr Holdco, Inc.; Edison International & Affiliated Entities Via Southern California Edison Company; Cadiz, Inc.; Charter Communications Inc.

**Top contributing campaigns:** Democratic Action Against The Recall Of Governor Newsom, Sponsored By Democratic Governors Association, California Democratic Party - Federal, Sharon Quirk-Silva For Assembly 2022, Josh Newman For Senate 2024, Rendon For Assembly 2022, Re-Elect Senator Atkins 2020, Lorena Gonzalez For Assembly 2020, Re-Elect Scott Wiener For State Senate 2024

## **DATA SET: CALIFORNIA REPUBLICAN PARTY**

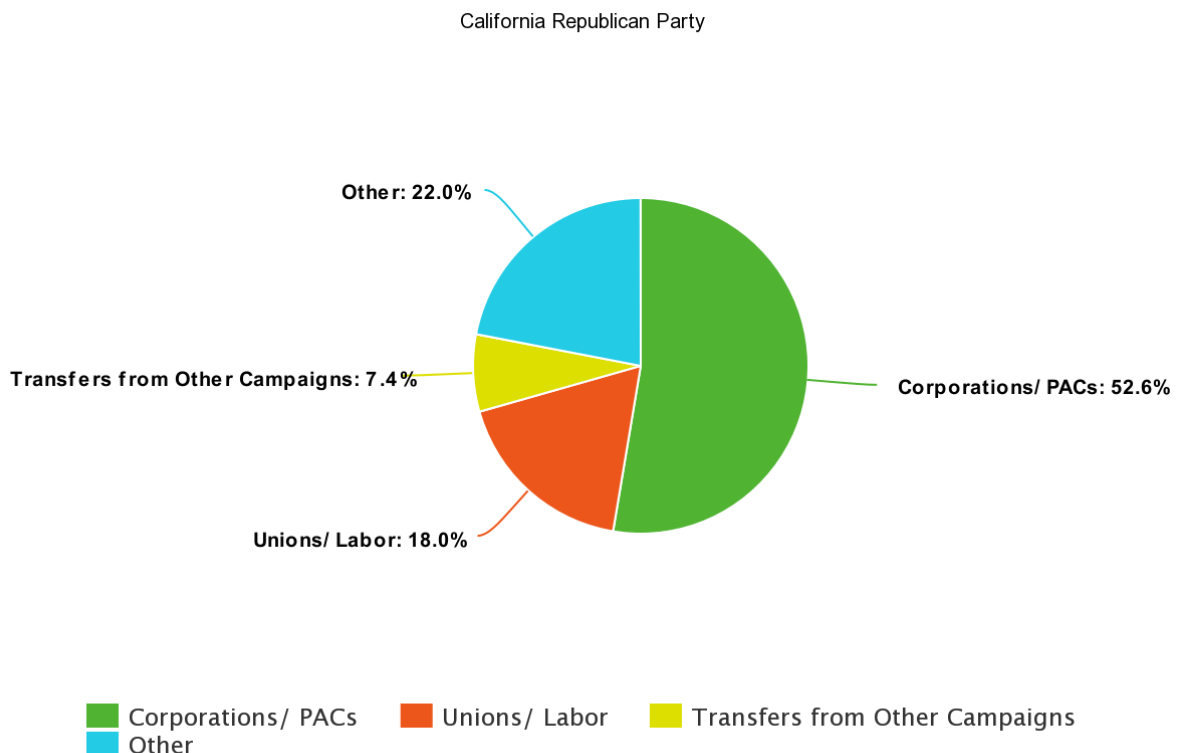
Total Raised from top 500: \$8,025,547.48

Corporations/Business PACs/ Other PACs = 283, total raised \$4,225,401.14

Labor Unions/ Prof Associations/ Associated PACs = 101, total raised \$1,441,068.34

Transfer from another campaign = 39, total raised \$595,503.00

Individuals/ Trusts/ Other = 77, total raised \$1,763,575.00, average contribution \$22,903.57



**Top contributing businesses:** Walmart Stores Inc; The Doctors' Management Company; Sempra Energy; Pacific Gas & Electric Corp.; Marathon Petroleum Corporation And Its Subsidiaries; In-N-Out Burger, A California Corporation; Farmers Group, Inc.; Edison International; Chevron Corporation And Its Subsidiaries/Affiliates; Anthem Blue Cross

**Top contributing campaigns:** Vince Fong For Assembly 2020, Gallagher For Assembly 2022, Friends Of Frank Bigelow For Assembly 2022, Phil Chen For Assembly 2022, Heath Flora For Assembly 2022, Marie Waldron For Assembly 2022, Jordan Cunningham For Assembly 2022, Patterson For Assembly 2022, Kiley For Assembly 2022, Devon Mathis For Assembly 2022

### **Key Points:**

1. The Republican Party received 32.4% more support from businesses/corporations than California Democratic Party
2. GOP received 30% less support from unions than the California Democratic Party

3. GOP received 9.4% more support from individuals and other sources than the California Democratic Party
4. The Democratic Party received nearly double the average contribution amount from individuals than the Republican Party (~\$43k vs ~\$23k).

## **DATA SET: REFORM CALIFORNIA**

This organization is not affiliated with either political party, but took a major role in supporting the 2021 Recall against Gov. Gavin Newsom and therefore is examined as a Republican campaign for our 2021 analysis.

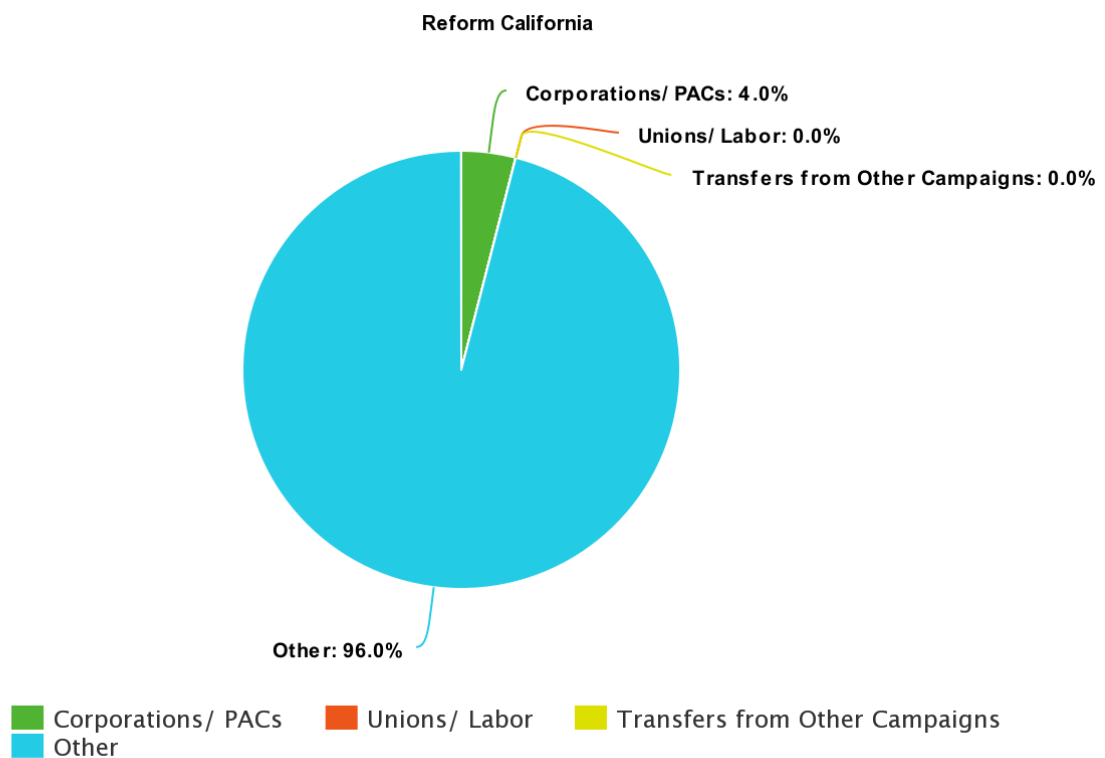
Total raised from top 500: \$261,868.13

Corporations/Business PACs/ Other PACs = 3, total raised \$10,500

Labor Unions/ Prof Associations/ Associated PACs = 0, total raised \$0

Transfer from another campaign = 0, total raised \$0

Individuals/ Trusts/ Other = 497, total raised \$251,368.13, average contribution \$505.77



**Top contributing businesses:** Maximum Mortgage Real Estate Inc, Next Step Medical Inc

### **Key Points:**

1. Reform California received the lowest average contribution from individuals from groups analyzed

## **DATA SET: NO ON NEWSOM RECALL — “STOP THE REPUBLICAN RECALL OF GOVERNOR”**

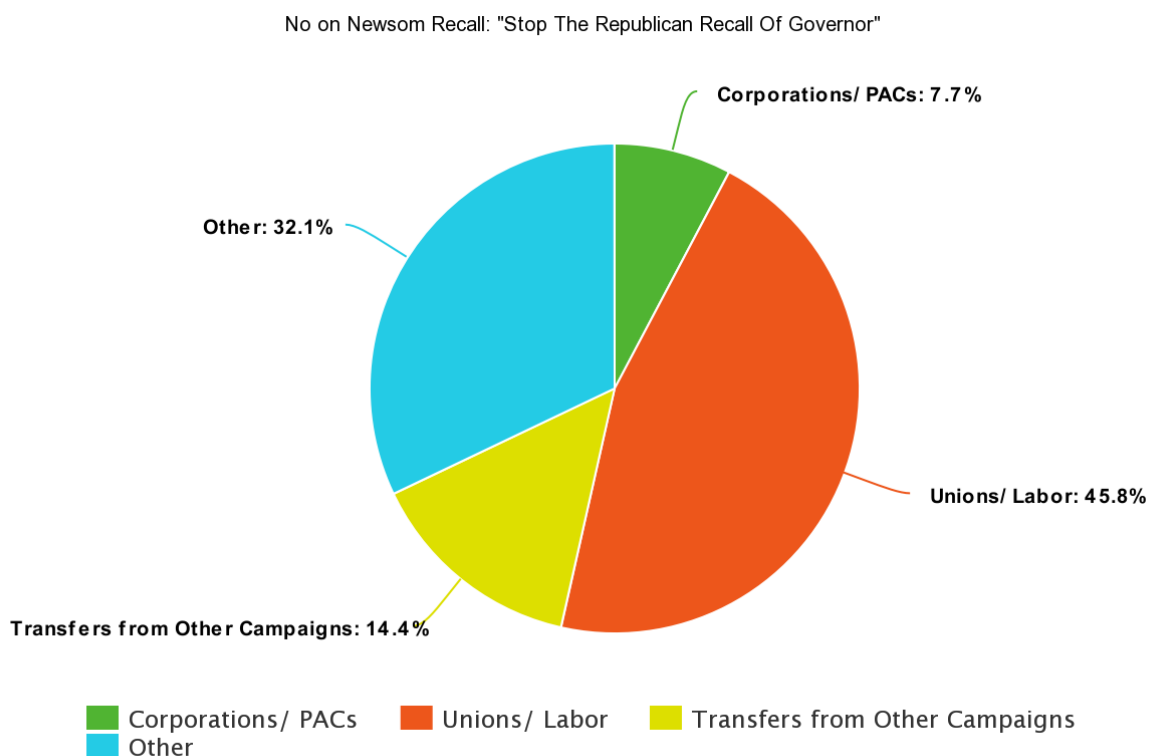
Total raised from top 500: \$59,637,851.02

Corporations/Business PACs/ Other PACs = 88, total raised \$4,616,992.73

Labor Unions/ Prof Associations/ Associated PACs = 121, total raised \$27,305,474.69

Transfer from another campaign = 95, total raised \$8,585,063.10

Individuals/ Trusts/ Other = 196, total raised \$19,130,320.50, average contribution \$97,603.68



**Top contributing businesses:** Cotchett, Pitre & McCarthy, LLP; Masimo Corporation; Molina Healthcare, Inc.; Advanced Nutrients US, LLC; Angelo K. Tsakopoulos And Affiliated Entities; Harbor Distributing, LLC; Courage California Issues; Walkup, Melodia, Kelly & Schoenberger; Dreyer Babich Buccola Wood And Campora, LLP; Lsn Partners, LLC

**Top contributing campaigns:** Democratic Action Against The Recall Of Governor Newsom, Sponsored By Democratic Governors Association; California Democratic Party; Citizens For A Better California, A Ballot Measure Committee Sponsored By Senator Steve Glazer; Caregivers & Californians United Against The Recall Of Governor Newsom, Sponsored By The National Union Of Healthcare Workers; Mi Familia Vota California Recall; Progressive Turnout Project Against The Newsom Recall (Fed ID# C00580068); Ted Lieu For Congress; Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender (LGBT) Caucus Leadership Fund; Protecting Choice In California, A Project Of Planned Parenthood Affiliates Of California; Moveon.Org Political Action

## **DATA SET: YES ON NEWSOM RECALL — CALIFORNIA PATRIOT COALITION**

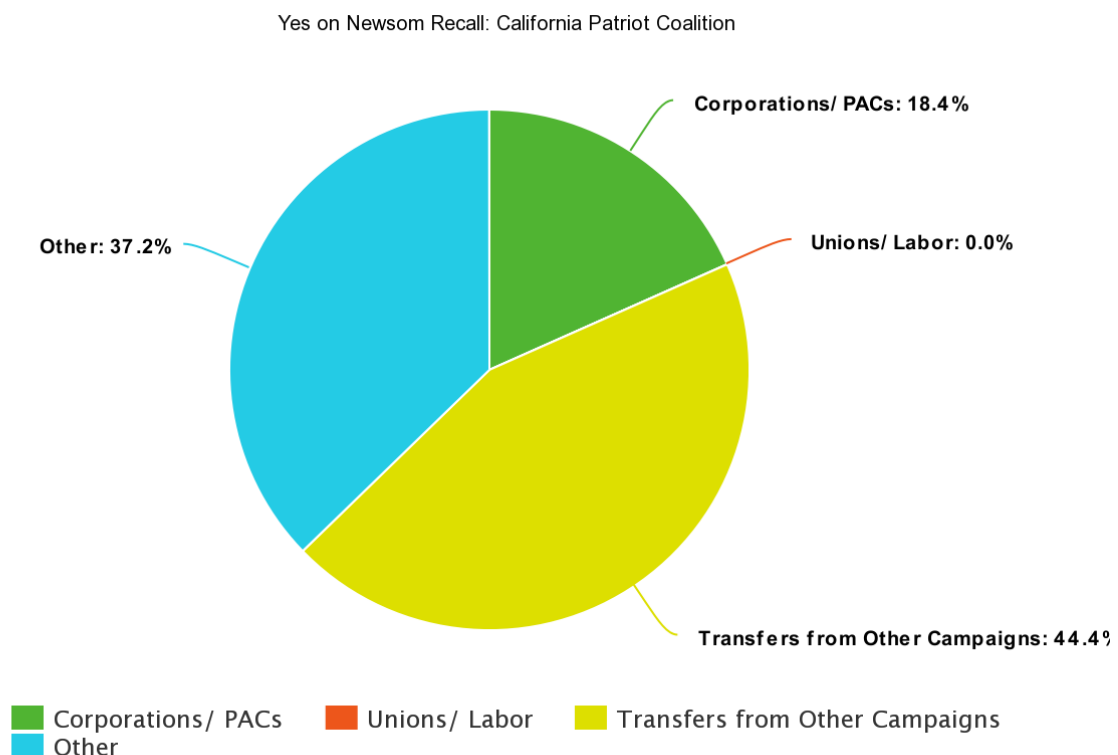
Total raised from top 500: \$2,232,095

Corporations/Business PACs/ Other PACs = 20, total raised \$410,202

Labor Unions/ Prof Associations/ Associated PACs = 0

Transfer from another campaign = 19, \$991,092.84

Individuals/ Trusts/ Other = 460, \$831,800.16, average contribution \$1,808.26



**Top contributing businesses:** DGB Ranch; Huck Pac; Hofmann Land Development Company; Boyett Petroleum; Nevets, Inc.; Early Sullivan Wright Gizer & Mcrae, Llp; Kmet, Llc; Purestyle Living, Llc; Las Posas Venture, Inc.; Cielo Village Partners, Lp

**Top contributing campaigns:** Rescue California - Recall Gavin Newsom, Kiley For Assembly 2022, Melissa Melendez For Lt. Governor 2022, Linda Blankenship For Ca Senate District 39 2020

### **Key Points:**

1. "YES" on Newsom recall received virtually 0% funding from unions, whereas "NO" on recall received 45.8% of its funding from unions
2. While both "YES" and "NO" on recall received similar percentages of funding from individuals, the average contribution from individuals for "NO" is over 50 times that of the avg. contribution for "YES"

## **DATA SET: LARRY ELDER FOR GOVERNOR 2021**

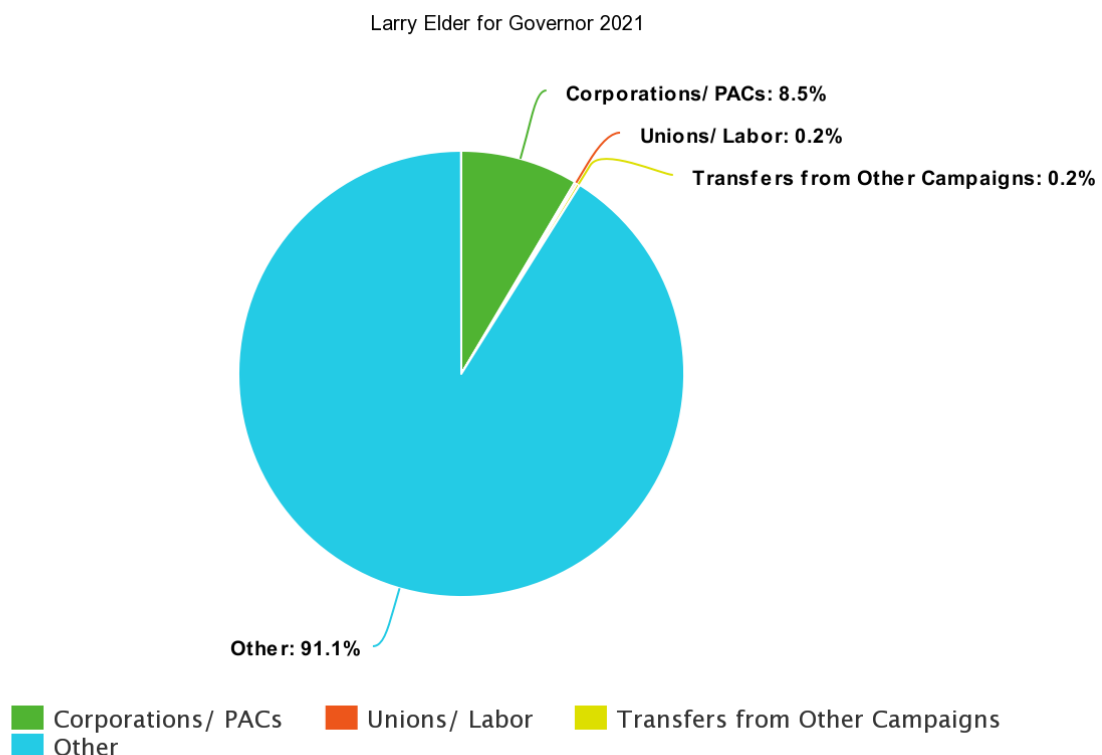
Total raised from top 500: \$2,941,303

Corporations/Business PACs/ Other PACs = 40, total raised \$251,000

Labor Unions/ Prof Associations/ Associated PACs = 1, \$5,000

Transfer from another campaign = 2, total raised \$6,613

Individuals/ Trusts/ Other = 457, total raised \$2,678,690, average contribution \$5,861.47



**Top contributing businesses:** Probitry International Corp; Madrone Ventures; Wax Properties Ltd; Ganahl Lumber Co.; Marshall Leong Investment Group, Inc.; Great American Harvesting; Streamline Irrigation Inc.; Weststar; The Termo Company; Adkison Engineers, Inc.

**Top contributing campaigns:** East Valley Republican Women Federated, Bampac

## **DATA SET: CA ASSEMBLY DEMOCRATS — SPEAKER ANTHONY RENDON (D)**

Total raised from top 500: \$1,201,552.11

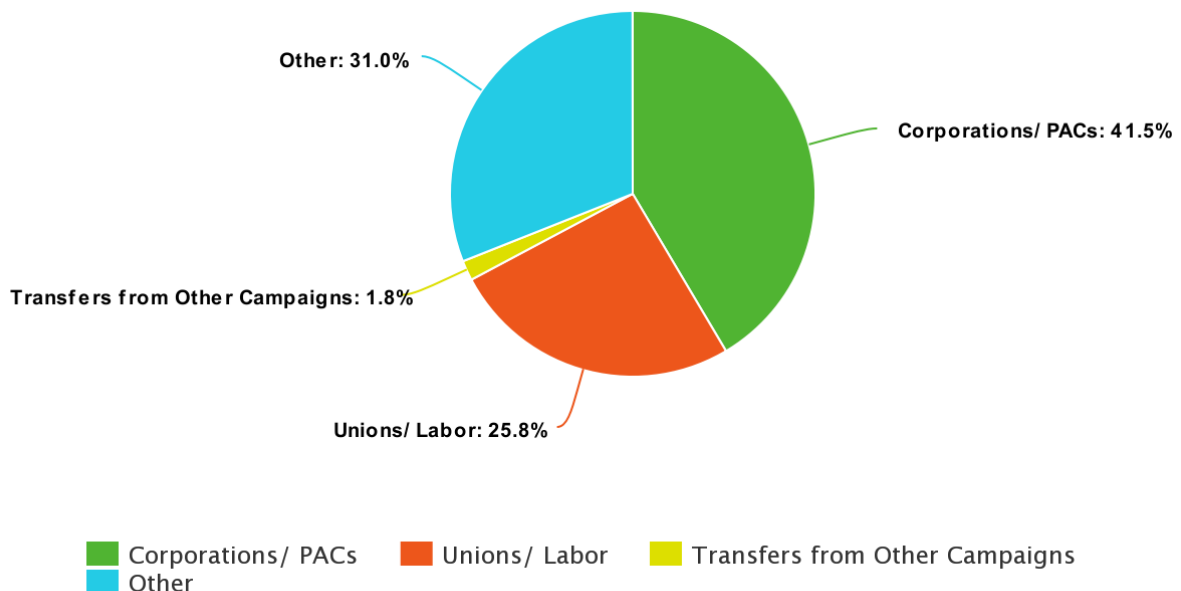
Corporations/Business PACs/ Other PACs = 147, total raised \$498,960.11

Labor Unions/ Prof Associations/ Associated PACs = 73, total raised \$309,873

Transfer from another campaign = 5, total raised \$21,100

Individuals/ Trusts/ Other = 203, total raised \$373,119, average contribution \$1,838.02

CA Assembly Democrats: Speaker Anthony Rendon



**Top contributing businesses:** Warner Brothers Entertainment Inc.; Airbnb, Inc.; Amazon.Com Services Llc; Visa, Inc.; Google Llc And Affiliated Entities; Pepsico, Inc.; Edison International & Affiliated Entities; Sempra Energy; Blue Diamond Growers Political Action Committee; Southern Glazer's Wine And Spirits, Llc

**Top contributing campaigns:** Planned Parenthood Advocacy, Project Los Angeles County Action Fund, John Chiang For Governor 2022, John Chiang For Governor 2022, John Chiang For Governor 2022, Tim Goodrich For Torrance City Council 2018

**DATA SET: CA ASSEMBLY REPUBLICANS — MINORITY LEADER**  
**MARIE WALDRON (R)**

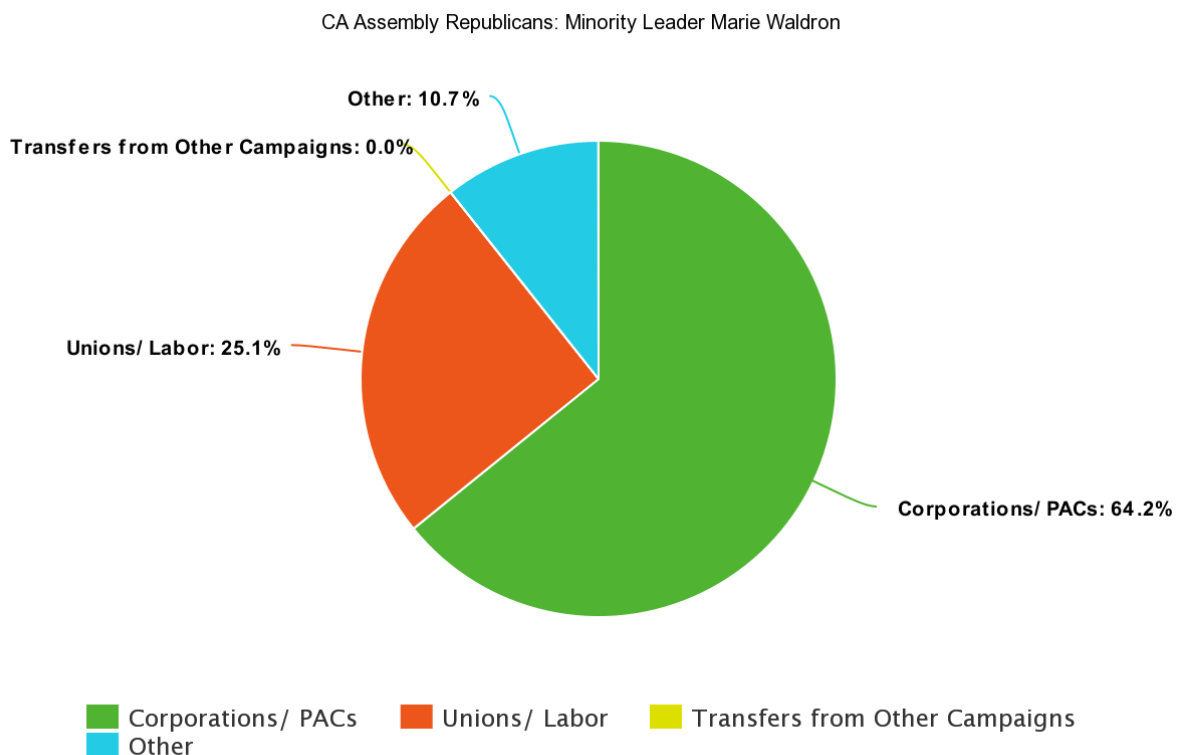
Total raised from top 500: \$338,369.8

Corporations/Business PACs/ Other PACs = 92, total raised \$217,169.8

Labor Unions/ Prof Associations/ Associated PACs = 34, total raised \$85,100

Transfer from another campaign = 0

Individuals/ Trusts/ Other = 12, total raised \$36,100, average contribution \$3,008.33



**Top contributing businesses:** Southern Glazer's Wine And Spirits LLC; Southern California Edison; Fox Corporation And Affiliated Entities; Chevron; Amazon.Com Services LLC; Sempra Energy; Gilead Sciences, Inc.; Airbnb Inc.; PepsiCo Inc.; Davita Healthcare Partners Inc And Affiliated Entities

**Key Points:**

1. The Republican Assembly Leader received 22.7% more support from business and PAC communities than the Democrat Leader

## **DATA SET: SENATE DEMOCRATS — PRESIDENT PRO TEM TONI ATKINS (D)**

Total raised from top 500: \$632,040.89

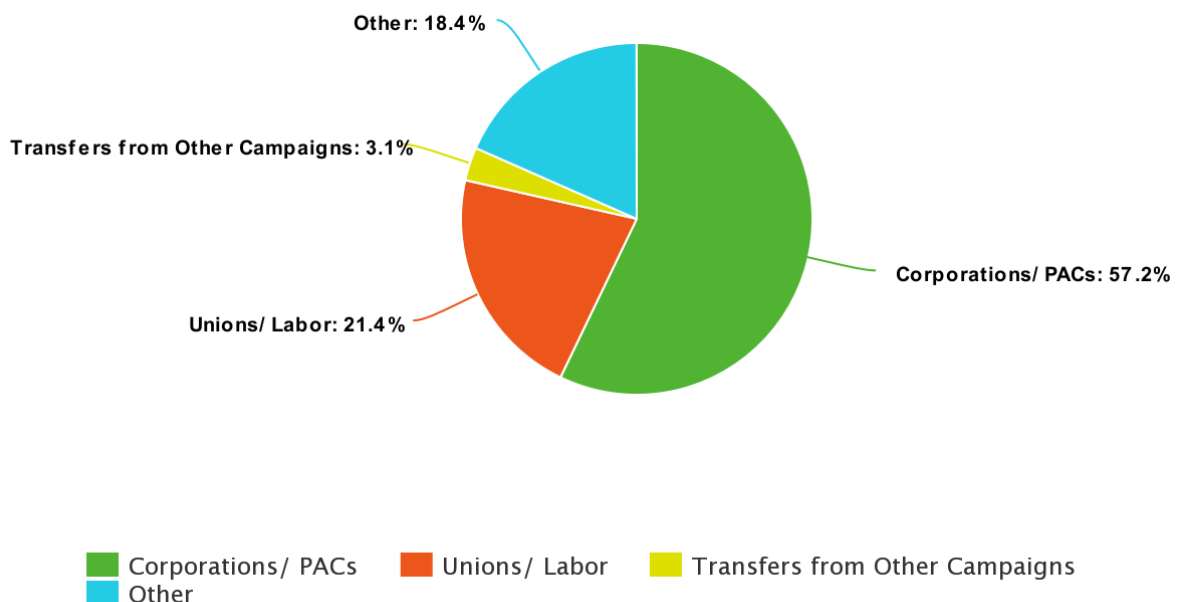
Corporations/Business PACs/ Other PACs = 115, total raised \$361,242.99

Labor Unions/ Prof Associations/ Associated PACs = 38, total raised \$135,122.31

Transfer from another campaign = 8, total raised \$19,391.59

Individuals/ Trusts/ Other = 45, total raised \$116,284, average contribution \$2,584.09

CA Senate Democrats: President pro Tempore Toni Atkins



**Top contributing businesses:** Zillow Inc.; Tesla Inc.; Anheuser Busch Companies; Davita Healthcare Partners, Inc. & Affiliated Entities; Thoroughbred Owners Of California; Swbg Operations Group; National Vision Inc.; The Dentists Insurance Company; Google Llc & Affiliated Entities (Mark Isakowitz); Del Mar Thoroughbred Club

**Top contributing campaigns:** California Yimby Victory Fund Pac, Lgbt Caucus Leadership Fund, Bill Dodd For Lt. Governor 2026

## **DATA SET: SENATE GOP — MINORITY LEADER SCOTT WILK (R)**

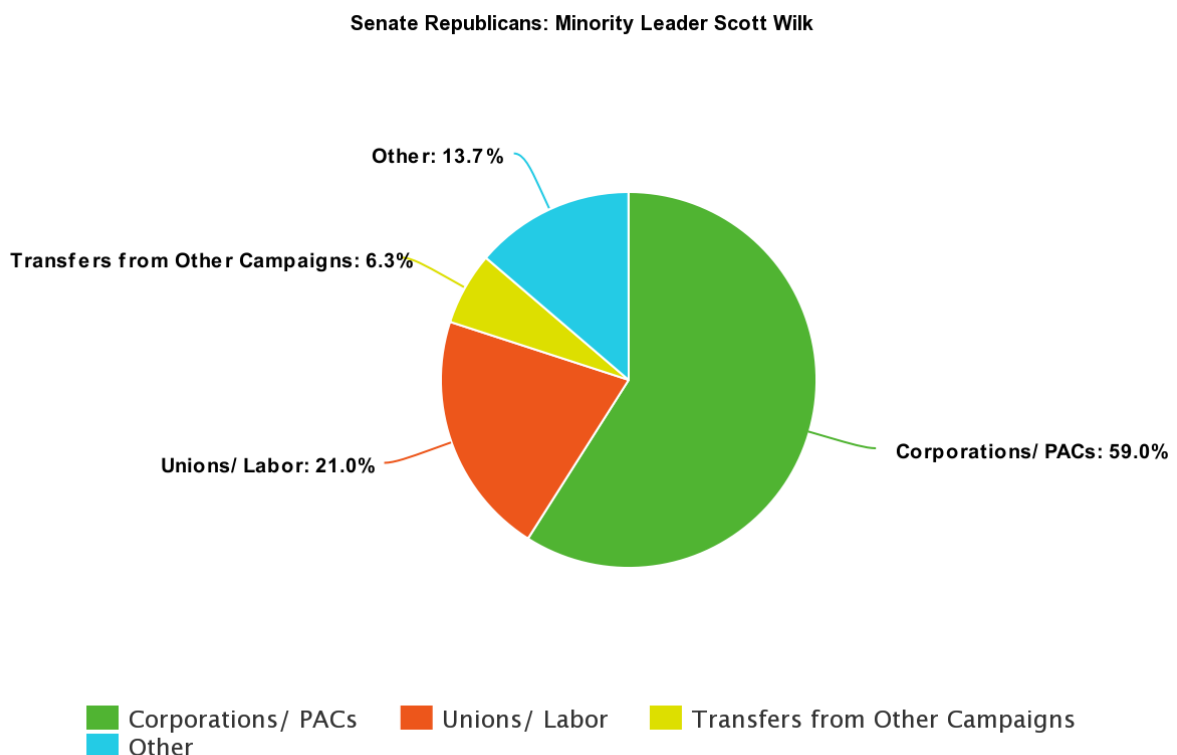
Total raised from top 500: \$458,533.55

Corporations/Business PACs/ Other PACs = 125, total raised \$270,600

Labor Unions/ Prof Associations/ Associated PACs = 49, total raised \$96,250

Transfer from another campaign = 13, total raised \$28,677.55

Individuals/ Trusts/ Other = 33, total raised \$63,006, average contribution \$1,909.27



**Top contributing businesses:** Philip Morris Usa Inc. And Its Affiliates, Anheuser Busch Companies, Inc., Deloitte Services Lp, Dish Network, Amazon.Com Services Llc, Molson Coors, The Dentists Insurance Company, California Fuels & Convenience Alliance Pac, Fox Corporation And Affiliated Entities, Valero Services, Inc.

**Top contributing campaigns:** California Republican Party, Compassion Pac, Gfc Courage Committee, Jean Fuller For Superintendent Of Public Instruction 2022

### **Key Points:**

1. The Democrat Leader received 4.7% more of their contributions from individuals and other sources than the Democrat Leader.

## **DATA SET: LGBT CAUCUS LEADERSHIP FUND**

This organization is not affiliated with either political party, but its members and beneficiaries are Democrats. This group took a major role in supporting its Democrat members, and is therefore analyzed as a Democrat campaign for our 2021 analysis.

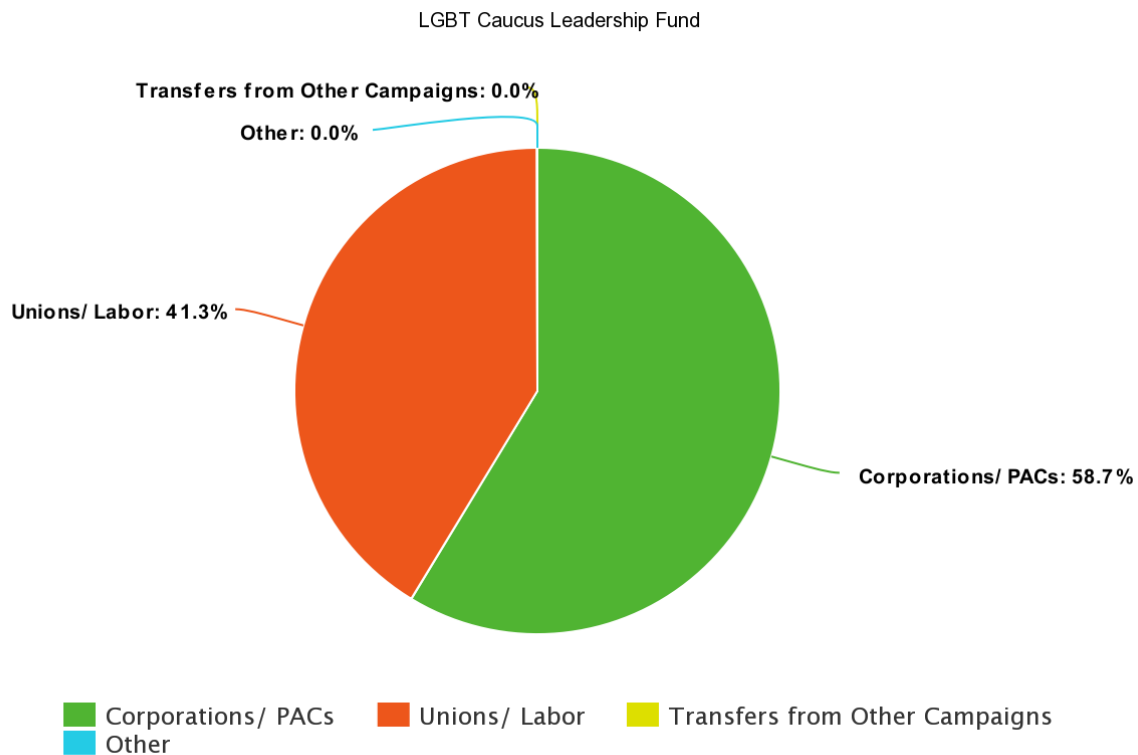
Total raised from top 500: \$708,000

Corporations/Business PACs/ Other PACs = 49, total raised \$415,500

Labor Unions/ Prof Associations/ Associated PACs = 25, total raised \$292,500

Transfer from another campaign = 0

Individuals/ Trusts/ Other = 0, average contribution N/A



**Top contributing businesses:** Southern California Edison; 1-800 Contacts, Inc.; Anheuser Busch Companies; 3m Company; Health Net Companies And California Health & Wellness, Wholly Owned Subsidiaries Of Centene, Inc(Daniel Chick); Charter Public Schools Pac; California Real Estate Political Action Committee - California (Crepac); East West Bank; Government Employees Insurance Co. (Geico); Blue Shield Of California



The Transparency Foundation is a 501c3 nonprofit, nonpartisan organization committed to making public institutions more transparent and accountable to the people they serve.

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