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Giffords attracting PAC funding

Defense firms, enviro groups join contributors

By Daniel Scarpinato

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In her re-election fundraising efforts, U.S. Rep. Gabrielle Giffords has pulled in more than \$380,000 from political action committees, ranging from environmental groups to defense contractors, recent campaign finance disclosures show.

The donations, which make up one-third of her overall contributions, are from more than 140 committees representing a mix of business, union and ideological interests, and can be attributed to her incumbent status, Giffords' campaign says.

PACs can give more than individuals under federal law, which has helped the Democrat to develop one of the richest freshman campaign organizations in the country — among the top five nationally, Washington Democrats say.

Giffords' likely opponent, state Senate President Tim Bee, a Tucson Republican, has not gotten any money from PACs. Bee, who has raised \$135,000 to Giffords' nearly \$1.2 million, is receiving individual contributions that average \$1,246. That's slightly higher than Giffords' average of \$1,194. But Giffords' average PAC donation is about \$2,700.

Much of Giffords' PAC money — \$150,000 — came from committees formed around a particular political focus or those formed by other members of Congress.

"Most of the PACs donate to perceived winners," said Michael McNulty, Giffords' campaign chairman. "PACs tend to split into those that are traditionally Democrat and those that are traditionally Republican."

And being an incumbent helps. Among her biggest checks: \$10,000 from both the Blue Dog Coalition, a group of moderate and conservative members of Congress that she belongs to, and AmeriPAC, a fundraising PAC set up by House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer.

In addition, Hoyer has donated \$4,000 of his own campaign money directly to Giffords.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has given \$4,000 to Giffords through her campaign committee, one of 20 members of Congress who have donated a total of nearly \$50,000 to Giffords through their own committees.

Various other PACs seeking to retain a Democratic majority in Congress have directed \$5,000 or more to Giffords.

Giffords received \$5,000 from the Human Rights Campaign, a gay- and lesbian-rights organization, and

Giffords' top PAC donations

One-third of Giffords' \$1.2 million in re-election contributions has come from political action committees, including \$10,000 each from:

AmeriPAC: A PAC founded by Steny Hoyer, House majority leader, to fund Democratic campaigns. Has disbursed \$550,000 to candidates this year.

Blue Dogs: A group of moderate and conservative Democratic representatives. Giffords is a member. Has disbursed \$435,000 this year.

BRIDGE PAC: Full name is "Building Relationships in Diverse Geographic Environments." It advocates progressive causes. Has disbursed \$340,000 this year.

International Union of Operating Engineers: With 400,000 members, its Web site says the union is the 12th-largest member of the AFL-CIO. Has disbursed \$1.3 million this year.

\$10,000 from BRIDGE PAC, a group that has given to dozens of Democrats across the country.

About \$80,000 of Giffords' PAC donations came from committees formed by businesses. Most of the business donations were well below the federal limit: \$1,000 from Honeywell; \$1,000 from her former employer, PricewaterhouseCoopers; \$1,000 from Qwest; \$2,000 from Union Pacific Railroad; and \$5,000 from UPS.

Giffords, who was an advocate for nearly \$226 million in defense and defense contracting in her federal earmark requests, received donations from two contractors: Lockheed Martin donated \$1,000, and General Dynamics gave \$2,000.

Giffords also collected nearly \$40,000 from professional or industry-related associations, including \$2,000 from the National Association of Realtors and \$3,000 from the American Hotel and Lodging Association.

Union and labor interests gave Giffords — a supporter of labor issues such as raising the federal minimum wage — a combined \$95,000. The Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees donated \$6,000. The operating engineers union gave the maximum, \$10,000.

Rules for PAC donations

PACs are allowed to donate \$5,000 to a candidate per election "cycle." The primary and general elections each count as a cycle, allowing \$10,000 for the full campaign, according to the Federal Election Commission.

But while the PACs can give the full \$10,000 now, Giffords can only spend up to \$5,000 before next year's primary.

PACs also can impact a candidate indirectly through "independent expenditures," spending money in support of or opposition to the candidate without working with the campaign. Last year, these expenditures, mainly done by the national parties, funneled millions more into Arizona campaigns than what the candidates raised.

In 2006, House candidates got nearly \$280 million from PACs, according to the FEC. Republicans, then in the majority, were the biggest beneficiaries, with \$160 million from PACs.

In last year's election, Giffords received \$625,000 from PACs — a quarter of her overall fundraising in that race.

While the reasons for donating vary, some PACs, like individuals, donate to gain influence, said Eric Ehst, executive director of the Arizona Clean Elections Institute.

"They generally donate to candidates who are going to support what their issue is," he said. "PACS, by definition, represent some group of people or ideas. Do they mean more than donations from individuals? Not necessarily."

GOP donations trail

The strong fundraising by Giffords and other freshman Democrats is even more significant in the face of limited national dollars in Republicans coffers. The latest disclosures show that nationally, Democrats continued to increase their lead over Republicans in the money race, with \$28 million on hand to the GOP's \$1.6 million. That means Bee and other potential GOP candidates may be able to count on less help than Democrats.

In a conference call with reporters last week, Tom Cole, chairman of the National Republican Congressional Committee, said Republicans would see a boost in fundraising as the election unfolds.

"We went through this in '93-94 when there's sort of a flirtation, if you will, by the business community with the Democratic Party," he said. "They found out then, as they'll find out now, that the Democratic Party is more loyal to the unions, environmentalists and trial lawyers than they are to the business community."

But Doug Thornell of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee pointed to polls showing Americans more trusting of Democrats on major issues. Fundraising numbers, he said, reflect that.

"Washington Republicans are in panic mode and on the defense for supporting an agenda that is devoid of issues and revolves around one priority, protecting George W. Bush," he said.

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