



THE POLITICS OF BUSINESS: CHAMBER GROUPS SUPPORT GOP

By
EDWIN BENDER

JULY 15, 2004

When Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry announced U.S. Sen. John Edwards as his vice presidential choice, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce issued notice that it may abandon its usual nonpartisan stance in presidential contests to oppose the Kerry-Edwards ticket.

Tom Donohue, head of U.S. Chamber of Commerce, has said he would recruit the “best people and greatest assets” to oppose the Democratic ticket.¹ The reason for the ire: the Chamber has been pushing for so-called tort reform and caps on lawsuit settlements for years. As a former trial lawyer who made his fortune suing corporations, Edwards is seen as an arch-nemesis of business.

While the Kerry-Edwards ticket may cause the Chamber to move from its fence-straddling position in presidential politics, it left that perch long ago where state candidates are concerned.

An examination of the state-level campaign contributing by the state and local affiliates of the Chamber and their executives shows a distinct Republican leaning. Nearly three-fourths of the \$5.5 million contributed across the country by the affiliates and executives during the 2000 and 2002 election cycles went to Republican candidates or party committees. An additional \$244,000 was directed to nonpartisan judicial campaigns, where the Chamber has pursued a strategy of aggressively supporting business-friendly judges.

The Institute's partial database² for elections held from 1990-1998 shows a similar pattern. Chamber groups gave at least \$3.6 million during that time period. Republican candidates received more than \$2.8 million of the funds, compared with \$586,000 for Democrats.

While the Chamber affiliates gave to candidates in nearly every state during the 2000 and 2002 election cycles, more than 95 percent of the total — \$5.2 million — went to candidates and party committees in just 20 states. And Republicans received 74 percent of that amount, or \$3.8 million.

While distinctly Republican in their contributing overall, the Chamber affiliates still adhere to the old axiom that money follows power. Five of the 20 states where the affiliates gave the most money have legislatures controlled by Democrats. In four of those states — California, West Virginia, Arkansas and Connecticut — the affiliates gave more to Democrats than Republicans, but at significantly closer margins than in states where Republicans controlled the legislature and received the most money. Only in Illinois, which has a legislature controlled by Democrats, did the Chamber affiliate still give more to Republicans — a lot more, as the chart on the following page shows. In states where legislatures were controlled either by Republicans or control was split between the two parties, Republican candidates received substantially more in Chamber contributions than did Democrats.

The groups gave \$3.3 million to Republican candidates in the 2000 and 2002 cycles. Sixty-two percent of that went to winning candidates and incumbents who were in office but not up for election — essentially, those who would be taking part in the public-policy process. And 75 percent of the \$978,000 given to Democratic candidates went to winners or incumbents. Winning Republicans received nearly \$2 million to the Democrats' \$703,000.

¹ Todd Wallack, "Corporate reaction cool; Kerry's choice likely to play better with consumers," San Francisco Chronicle, July 7, 2004, P. C1.

² The Institute began as a regional project, originally collecting campaign-finance data in eight Western states. It began expanding its collection in the late 1990s and has full 50-state databases for elections held in 2000 and later.

The Chamber's political bent also was apparent in the contributions made in races where no incumbent was running, called open seats. Open seats often become targets for the parties as they try to wrest control of the legislature from the opposing party. The Chamber gave \$1.3 million to candidates vying for open seats, supporting Republican candidates with two-thirds of the funds.

So, while the U.S. Chamber of Commerce says it will have to abandon its nonpartisan position in presidential politics to oppose the Kerry-Edwards ticket, data indicates it will do so without much strain on its membership at the state level.

The charts below illustrate the disparity in contributing by Chamber of Commerce affiliates and their executives at the state level. For a full list of Chamber giving in the states, please see P. 5.

CHAMBER AFFILIATE CONTRIBUTIONS BY PARTY IN TOP 20 STATES, 2000 AND 2002 ELECTION CYCLES

STATE	TOTAL	TO REPUBLICANS	TO DEMOCRATS	LEGISLATIVE CONTROL 2003*
Indiana	\$1,010,419	\$962,705	\$47,715	Split
Illinois	\$737,230	\$621,646	\$114,585	Democrat
Michigan	\$624,943	\$355,733	\$28,945	Republican
California	\$548,108	\$255,252	\$294,856	Democrat
Pennsylvania	\$478,284	\$415,256	\$63,028	Republican
Florida	\$355,323	\$296,038	\$59,285	Republican
New York	\$343,143	\$246,556	\$95,837	Split
Nevada	\$259,461	\$165,795	\$93,666	Split
Nebraska**	\$162,990	\$13,766	\$1,700	Nonpartisan
Missouri	\$125,223	\$96,528	\$28,695	Republican
South Carolina	\$108,475	\$76,850	\$31,125	Republican
Kansas	\$81,149	\$70,410	\$10,739	Republican
Ohio	\$79,695	\$74,691	\$5,004	Republican
Arkansas	\$55,720	\$20,170	\$33,300	Democrat
Texas	\$53,718	\$51,744	\$1,974	Republican
West Virginia	\$52,982	\$20,600	\$32,382	Democrat
Minnesota	\$51,918	\$43,635	\$7,725	Split
Delaware	\$49,235	\$29,675	\$19,560	Split
Connecticut	\$47,910	\$19,865	\$28,045	Democrat
Idaho	\$35,450	\$30,450	\$5,000	Republican

* Data from the National Conference on State Legislatures Web site.

** Candidates for Nebraska's unicameral legislature run on a nonpartisan basis; the bulk of Chamber contributions went to these nonpartisan candidates.

Chamber affiliates are able to raise hundreds of thousands of dollars from their members, which they can then contribute to candidates. Many of the affiliates with the greatest ability to raise money are also in key presidential battleground states.

The table on the following page shows the top-giving state Chamber affiliates and the amounts they contributed to candidates in the 2000 and 2002 election cycles.

**CHAMBER AFFILIATE CONTRIBUTIONS TO CANDIDATES, 2000 AND 2002
ELECTION CYCLES**

CONTRIBUTOR	TO REPUBLICANS	TO DEMOCRATS	TOTAL *
Indiana Chamber of Commerce	\$920,967	\$23,765	\$944,731
Illinois Chamber of Commerce	\$357,506	\$46,250	\$403,756
Just Our Basics/JOBS PAC (California)	\$155,000	\$236,335	\$391,335
Pennsylvania Chamber of Business & Industry	\$322,348	\$18,478	\$340,826
Michigan Chamber of Commerce	\$158,626	\$0	\$236,108
Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce	\$144,045	\$63,616	\$207,661
Florida Chamber of Commerce	\$149,750	\$24,000	\$173,750
Chicago Chamber of Commerce	\$120,975	\$40,235	\$161,210
Detroit Regional Chamber of Commerce	\$35,650	\$13,250	\$156,150
Nebraska Chamber of Commerce	\$1,066	\$0	\$124,694
New York State Business Council	\$80,006	\$33,575	\$114,031
Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce	\$45,425	\$2,400	\$97,492
Missouri Chamber of Commerce	\$74,700	\$13,420	\$88,120
California Chamber of Commerce	\$58,734	\$23,061	\$81,795
South Carolina Chamber of Commerce	\$56,100	\$13,425	\$70,025
Ohio Chamber of Commerce	\$55,621	\$3,314	\$58,935
Kansas Chamber of Commerce	\$49,600	\$6,539	\$56,139
West Virginia Chamber of Commerce	\$19,800	\$28,045	\$47,845
Arkansas Chamber of Commerce	\$16,950	\$27,600	\$45,800
Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce	\$26,725	\$12,400	\$39,125

* Totals do not include contributions to political party committees but do include contributions to nonpartisan candidates.

While the bulk of the Chamber contributions went to candidates, the groups gave about 15 percent of their total contributions in 2000 and 2002 to political party committees at the state level. Again, the giving was heavily tilted toward the Republican committees, which received \$660,000 of the approximately \$816,000 given to party committees.

The table below shows the top 10 party committees receiving Chamber money during the four-year period.

**CHAMBER AFFILIATE CONTRIBUTIONS TO PARTY COMMITTEES,
2000 AND 2002 ELECTION CYCLES**

PARTY COMMITTEE	TOTAL
Republican Party of Florida	\$139,950
New York Senate Republican Campaign Committee-Reporting	\$100,850
Republican State Senate Campaign Committee of Illinois	\$65,800
House Republican Campaign Committee of Illinois	\$65,550
House Republican Campaign Committee of Michigan	\$46,947
Florida Democratic Party	\$31,500
Senate Republican Campaign Committee of Michigan	\$27,950
Democratic Assembly Campaign Committee Of New York-Reporting	\$27,925
House Republican Campaign Committee Of Pennsylvania	\$26,550
House Republican Party Minnesota Campaign Committee	\$23,510

**STATE-BY-STATE CHAMBER AFFILIATE CONTRIBUTIONS, 2000 AND
2002 ELECTION CYCLES**

RANK	STATE	TO REPUBLICANS	TO DEMOCRATS	TOTAL
1	Indiana	\$962,705	\$47,715	\$1,010,419
2	Illinois	\$621,646	\$114,585	\$737,231
3	Michigan	\$355,733	\$28,945	\$624,943
4	California	\$252,652	\$294,756	\$548,108
5	Pennsylvania	\$415,256	\$63,028	\$478,284
6	Florida	\$296,038	\$59,285	\$355,323
7	New York	\$246,556	\$95,837	\$343,143
8	Nevada	\$165,795	\$93,666	\$259,461
9	Nebraska	\$13,766	\$1,700	\$162,990
10	Missouri	\$96,528	\$28,695	\$125,223
11	South Carolina	\$76,850	\$31,125	\$108,475
12	Kansas	\$70,410	\$10,739	\$81,149
13	Ohio	\$74,691	\$5,004	\$79,695
14	Arkansas	\$20,170	\$33,300	\$55,720
15	Texas	\$51,744	\$1,974	\$53,718
16	West Virginia	\$20,600	\$32,382	\$52,982
17	Minnesota	\$43,635	\$7,725	\$51,918
18	Delaware	\$29,675	\$19,560	\$49,235
19	Connecticut	\$19,865	\$28,045	\$47,910
20	Idaho	\$30,450	\$5,000	\$35,450
21	Georgia	\$6,331	\$21,545	\$27,876
22	Oklahoma	\$12,295	\$15,458	\$27,753
23	Rhode Island	\$3,300	\$23,425	\$26,925
24	South Dakota	\$20,850	\$4,010	\$24,860
25	Arizona	\$10,738	\$1,382	\$22,120
26	New Jersey	\$14,760	\$5,500	\$20,260
27	Massachusetts	\$2,265	\$13,230	\$15,495
28	North Carolina	\$2,251	\$11,725	\$13,976
29	Virginia	\$10,768	\$3,180	\$13,948
30	Alabama	\$8,000	\$4,000	\$12,000
31	Maryland	\$1,560	\$7,000	\$8,560
32	Utah	\$4,800	\$1,450	\$6,250
33	Kentucky	\$1,650	\$4,075	\$5,725
34	Oregon	\$2,950	\$2,385	\$5,335
35	Wisconsin	\$3,175	\$1,765	\$5,040
36	Louisiana	\$700	\$4,100	\$4,800
37	Colorado	\$3,625	\$925	\$4,550
38	Washington	\$2,200	\$1,950	\$4,150
39	Alaska	\$3,330	\$270	\$3,600
40	Montana	\$1,729	\$360	\$2,874
41	Hawaii	\$550	\$1,000	\$1,550
42	Maine	\$300	\$1,200	\$1,500
43	Mississippi	\$00	\$00	\$1,000
44	Tennessee	\$00	\$625	\$625
45	Vermont	\$19	\$500	\$519
45	New Mexico	\$325	\$25	\$350
47	New Hampshire	\$100	\$200	\$300
TOTAL		\$5,523,317	\$3,983,334	\$1,134,350