Medical Society PAC Money: How Much and for Whom?
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Introduction

Healthcare organizations and physicians are a major force behind campaign contributions. In the 2012 election cycle, the healthcare sector has spent more than $147,136,594 on political parties or candidates, according to the nonprofit Center for Responsive Politics (CRP).[1] Except for the presidential race, where President Barack Obama is leading Mitt Romney in donations from the health sector, it's the Republicans overall who are pocketing more money this year from the healthcare industry and its professional societies.

That was not the case in 2008. During that cycle, physicians and other health professionals contributed about $166.8 million to federal candidates, with Democrats receiving 54% of the funding, edging out contributions to Republicans for the first time since 1992. In fact, in 2008, only retirees and 4 other industries spent more on political campaigns than health professionals did, according to the CRP.[2]

This year, the industry is reverting to its previous political habits; contributions from the healthcare sector going to parties and candidates target $63,574,649 (55%) for Republicans, and $52,570,927 (45%) for Democrats. Despite this trend, to date, Obama is ahead in health sector donations, receiving $7,552,342, compared with $5,132,593 for Romney.

The top 20 contributors from the healthcare sector include a private clinic, a physician-owned insurer, and various medical societies and pharmaceutical companies. See Table 1.

Table 1. Top 20 Healthcare-Sector Contributors to Federal Candidates, Parties, and Outside Groups[1]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Amount*</th>
<th>Dems</th>
<th>Repubs</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Adelson Drug Clinic</td>
<td>$22,040,800 0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>Indivs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Cooperative of American Physicians</td>
<td>$2,698,245 2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>PACs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons</td>
<td>$1,467,800 25%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>Soft $</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>American Dental Association</td>
<td>$1,343,849 40%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Pfizer Inc</td>
<td>$1,267,136 52%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Select Medical Corp</td>
<td>$1,132,450 5%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>American College of Radiology</td>
<td>$1,127,134 29%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>29%</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>American Society of Anesthesiologists</td>
<td>$1,109,150 37%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>37%</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>American Health Care Association</td>
<td>$1,093,695 44%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>45%</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>American College of Emergency Physicians</td>
<td>$1,060,500 41%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>41%</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>American Hospital Association</td>
<td>$1,051,122 58%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>58%</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Amgen Inc</td>
<td>$1,017,312 51%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>53%</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>McKesson Corp</td>
<td>$991,325 40%</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Abbott Laboratories</td>
<td>$878,980 39%</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>Medco Health Solutions</td>
<td>$833,120 47%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>47%</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>Stryker Corp</td>
<td>$819,464 7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>American Physical Therapy Association</td>
<td>$816,600 54%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>54%</td>
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<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>AstraZeneca PLC</td>
<td>$795,075 44%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>American Medical Association</td>
<td>$785,437 45%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Merck &amp; Co</td>
<td>$763,935 51%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*All donations made during the 2011-2012 election cycle to date, as released by the Federal Election Commission

PACs = political action committees
Author’s Note: The data used in this article are taken from OpenSecrets.org, which hosts a searchable database provided by CRP for identifying donors and the parties and candidates they support. It is useful for anyone interested in digging into the sources of political funding. Reports on contributions to Democrats or Republicans reflect only those contributions that have been disclosed. The balance of funds has either not been spent or is “soft money,” which can be used, among other things, for expenses and to support nonfederal candidates.

The Top 2 Healthcare-Sector Contributors

Adelson Drug Clinic

The largest contributor on the list of health organizations is the Adelson Drug Clinic, which contributed $22,040,800 in soft money, all of which supports conservative organizations and PACs, including the super-PACs Winning Our Future and Restore our Future. The clinic, founded by Dr. Miriam and Sheldon G. Adelson, supports research and treatment for drug abuse. There are two centers, one in Las Vegas and the other in Tel Aviv, Israel.

Although the Adelson Clinic is listed as the major contributor in the healthcare sector, according to reports in the popular press, Adelson’s well-known conservative opposition to the Obama administration appears to rest more on major differences about Israel policy than on healthcare issues. Furthermore, the amount provided on the list above is from the clinic and does not represent Adelson’s total contributions, including personal funds, to super-PACs ($42.3 million) or the contribution of $20,493,350 from Las Vegas Sands Corp., where Adelson has controlling interest.

Cooperative of American Physicians

At $2,699,245, the second largest healthcare donor is the Cooperative of American Physicians, a California-based, physician-owned insurance organization, which provides liability coverage to nearly 12,000 California doctors. Its contribution of $110,900 to individual candidates only slightly favors Republicans (52%) over Democrats (48%). The balance of $2,588,345, according to the Center for Public Integrity and CRP, has largely gone unspent so far. Some expenditures have been pegged to fees, travel, polling, political consultants, and miscellaneous campaign expenses. Not yet known are how the rest of the funds will be directed and the political objectives of the Cooperative of American Physicians. Because this is a physician-owned business that provides medical liability insurance, it might be assumed that at least some of its support will be directed toward groups or candidates that support tort reform.

Contributions From Medical Societies and Organizations

When looking at the list of medical society contributors (see Table 1), the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons (AAOS) was third on the total healthcare contributor list for 2012 and the American Dental Association (ADA) was fourth. AAOS has spent $1,467,800 so far, three quarters of it tagged for Republicans. It has also spent $1,076,799 in lobbying efforts. ADA, with contributions of $1,343,649, also favors Republicans (60% of donations) and has spent $1,340,000 for lobbying. Other medical organizations were also listed among the top 20 healthcare-sector contributors:

- American College of Radiology: $1,127,134 (29% Democrats, 71% Republicans); lobbying: $1,751,232
- American Society of Anesthesiologists: $1,109,150 (37% Democrats, 63% Republicans); lobbying $520,000
- American College of Emergency Physicians: $1,060,500 (41% Democrats, 59% Republicans); lobbying $1,783,550
- American Physical Therapy Association: $816,600 (54% Democrats, 46% Republicans); lobbying $830,000

The American Hospital Association (AHA) and American Medical Association (AMA) also landed in the top 20 of all healthcare-sector contributors (Table 1). AHA’s contributions of $1,051,122 favored Democrats (58%), while the AMA tagged more of its total of $785,437 to Republicans (55%).

Table 2 lists contributions from the PACs of many major medical societies and professional organizations. At this point in the election cycle, Republicans have received more than Democrats: $9,966,377 (58% of total) vs $7,070,844 (42% of total). Note that the amounts shown for these organizations on the general list of healthcare-sector contributors in Table 1 differ from the PAC money listed in Table 2. This could reflect different timing as well as other forms of contributions.
Observations

The trend this election year toward conservatism among health professionals is certainly largely due to their conflicted reaction to the Affordable Care Act (ACA). The response is not consistent, however. With emphasis in the ACA on increasing reimbursement for primary care clinicians and extending their influence in medical practice, the organizations representing nurses, primary care physicians, and other generalists tend to favor the Democrats -- if only slightly.

The American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP), for example, has generally supported the ACA, and after the Supreme Court ruling, AAFP President Glen Stream, MD, said, “By upholding the Affordable Care Act, the Supreme Court has ensured that Americans have access to affordable, sustainable health care coverage and that they receive high-quality, coordinated and efficient care based on primary care. It is a future that family physicians happily anticipate.” As for its position on PAC...
donations, the AAFP seeks to keep them balanced. AAFP's donation policy includes considerations such as the committee that
the elected official or candidate serves on, his or her role in the committee, and previous positions on issues of interest to
primary care physicians.

On the other hand, many specialties are facing cuts in fees and procedures under the ACA, so the tendency for their
organizations to lean toward the Republican side is hardly surprising.

The disparities in the amounts of money coming from the specialty and primary care organizations may also reflect the financial
discrepancies within the professional community, with contributions from the organizations representing the wealthier specialties
tending to be more substantial than those from the primary care and nursing organizations.

Where specialty and primary care professionals come together in agreement is on tort reform. There is general disappointment
with the Obama administration for its failure to address the high cost of premiums, defensive medicine, and other malpractice
issues, which are burdensome for nearly all physicians. This issue has somewhat dampened the enthusiasm that even many
primary care physicians have for the current healthcare reform legislation.

The Pharmaceutical Industry

By far, at $124,385,831, most of the money that the pharmaceutical industry has spent to influence government has gone into
lobbying efforts. PAC contributions from the pharmaceutical industry account for only $12,056,764 (43% to Democrats and
57% to Republicans). Pfizer's PAC has made the largest contribution ($836,450), with slightly more of it going to Democrats
($451,500) than to Republicans ($384,950). McKesson Corp, second on this list, is one of the exceptions, contributing $422,000
to Republicans and $215,500 to Democrats. Most pharmaceutical companies, however, seem to split their contributions more or
less equally between the major parties. See the full list.

References

1. Center for Responsive Politics. Health: top contributors to federal candidates, parties, and outside groups.
2. Center for Responsive Politics. Health professionals: background.
    http://www.publicintegrity.org/2012/04/26/8727/donor-profile-cooperative-american-physicians Accessed September 7,
    2012.