

Hey Voter, can you spare a dime?

Recently I searched the Ohio Secretary of State's web site to learn where our legislators get their campaign funds and how they spend them. I decided to "follow the money" of one randomly selected Ohio state legislator. I will call him "my legislator," although he evidently belongs to someone else.

My legislator accepted contributions from a wide variety of big corporate interests (PACs) including pharmaceuticals, public utilities and energy suppliers, banks and finance companies, insurance, retailers, mining and manufacturing, and health care. And there are plenty more.

Labor unions contributed conspicuously to his campaign fund through their PACs. Electrical workers, laborers, civil service employees, state, county and municipal employees, carpenters, teachers, the Ohio AFL-CIO, and the Teamsters are among his contributors.

The professional and trade associations that have given money to my legislator include those representing doctors, dentists, hospitals, nurses, lawyers, mortgage brokers, cable television operators, accountants, contractors, credit unions, funeral directors, fair managers, home builders, merchants, the oil and gas industry, optometrists, osteopaths, podiatrists, therapists, realtors, police and firefighters.

Often, his contributors are at odds with each other. For example, in the same year the Sierra Club (environmentalists) gave my candidate money, so did the coal industry lobby.

My legislator and his state party played a sort of shell game with campaign funds. During his last campaign the state party, through their various committees and caucuses, contributed about one million dollars, all as in-kind contributions. Those in-kind contributions (well over cash limits) were generally used to pay expensive media costs.

His state party also gave him cash in amounts within the legal limits. Filtering money through the party caucuses COULD allow individuals and PACs to contribute to a candidate without the direct connection that must be reported in a campaign finance report. It's a sort of "Make-sure-this-helps-my-candidate," (wink, wink), deal.

Some of his cash came from voters like me. So I wondered, "What did my candidate do with the money he raised?" The answer was not what I expected.

To date, my legislator has reimbursed himself nearly \$67,000.00 for expenses out of campaign funds. He spent over \$4000 of his campaign contributions on OSU tickets!

My legislator has his wife and children on the campaign payroll, paying his children to canvass voters.

He has paid "volunteers" to walk in parades, to knock on doors, to make those annoying phone calls, to place yard signs, and to distribute his campaign literature. He has paid for "food and beverages" for his "volunteers."

None of this is illegal, but not what I thought my contributions were paying for.

My legislator is a true POLITICIAN, bought and paid for by special interests. I wonder who he really represents on the Statehouse floor.

In the interest of fairness, there are certainly many legislators and candidates who are not so beholden to corporate and special interests, and who only use their campaign funds to buy yard signs, media spots, and literature.

You can check out YOUR federal, state and local legislators' campaign finances at:

<http://www.sos.state.oh.us/candidates.aspx>

Information about federal candidates is available here: <http://www.opensecrets.org/index.php>