

50 CAMPAIGN FINANCE STORIES IN 50 MINUTES

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CANDIDATE FUNDRAISING

1. Fundraising prowess. How much money has an incumbent raised compared with previous years? Has he or she exceeded the amount raised in the previous election?
2. Has a challenger raised enough to be competitive?
3. Political action committee contributions. Match with committee assignments.
4. Who's on the incumbent's finance committee - i.e., who in Washington is helping the incumbent raise money?
5. The endless campaign. How much money and how many fundraising events are lawmakers doing in off-years?
6. Using campaign funds to pay the babysitter, the new car, parking tickets and trips.
7. After Election Day, how are candidates paying off campaign debt? Are they holding fundraisers before they're sworn in? Are company PACs who gave to their opponents now trying to make up for it?
8. Is anyone in the candidate's family being paid as campaign staff or a consultant [e.g., Rep. John Doolittle's wife]?
9. Is the lawmaker contributing to other candidates? Is the lawmaker getting contributions from his or her colleagues?
10. Is the lawmaker hosting fundraisers for colleagues, or partnering with lobbyists to host fundraisers for colleagues?
11. Who are the lawmaker's biggest campaign donors? What does he do for them?
12. Does the lawmaker schedule fundraising events focusing on a particular industry? Is this timed to a specific bill?
13. What kind of fundraisers does the lawmaker throw? Who hosts them?
14. Who has the lawmaker hired as campaign consultants?
15. How much money does the candidate raise from individual donors as opposed to PACs?
16. How much money does the candidate raise from the district or the state as opposed to elsewhere?
17. Is the candidate raising more money than needed to win re-election in preparation for a possible race for higher office?
18. Where are the new committee chairs raising their PAC donations from? Compare the makeup of their PAC donations in previous elections.
19. Where are the freshmen raising their PAC money from? Note if PAC donations from a particular industry have increased now that the freshman has landed a seat on the congressional committee that oversees that industry.

20. Check a vote on a major issue. See if there is a correlation between campaign contributions and a person's vote on the measure.

FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE

21. Any unusual investments or partnerships? Who are the other partners?

22. Day trades. Are lawmakers getting IPOs and immediately selling them?

23. Regular stock trades. Do lawmakers own stock in companies under the jurisdiction of their committees? Are they buying or selling when their committees are considering legislation affecting that industry?

24. Real estate transactions. Did the lawmaker buy or sell a house? To whom? Randy Cunningham sold his house above market value to a defense contractor that he secured earmarks for.

25. Privately funded trips. Where are the lawmakers traveling and who is paying for them? Are the benefactors under the jurisdiction of their committees?

26. Do lawmakers have or support charities, especially charities that nobody's heard of before? Who's supporting them?

PERSONAL PACS

27. Does your member have a leadership political action committee? Why?

28. Who funds that PAC? Are the contributors the same ones who give to the campaign?

29. What is the money spent on?

30. What is a retiring lawmaker doing with his or her campaign funds? Are they using them as a PAC?

LEGISLATION

31. Which bills has the lawmaker introduced? Who are the beneficiaries?

32. Has the lawmaker obtained any earmarks or tax provisions? Who benefits? Are they in the lawmaker's district? How much have they given to the lawmaker's campaign?

2008

33. How are the presidential hopefuls wooing local politicians? Two years before the 2004 campaign, John Edwards' PAC gave the Iowa Democrats new computers.

34. Are the prospective candidates contributing to the campaigns of politicians in Iowa, New Hampshire or other early presidential states?

STATE AND LOCAL

35. How do your state lawmakers pass the evenings during the legislative session? If your state bans fundraising during the session, are events spring-loaded to happen just after adjournment? Are there other ways around the ban?

DONORS

36. Who are the biggest local donors? Who do they support? Why?

37. Who were the biggest soft money donors to the political parties? What do they spend their money on now?

38. Have any of the donors exceeded the national limits on overall campaign giving?

39. Who are the biggest local givers to independent 527 groups?

40. Who are the most successful fundraisers? How do they do it?

41. Is the region a magnet for fundraising?

COMPANIES

42. Who do the political action committees of local companies contribute to? What about the corporate officers? Why?

43. How much do local companies spend on lobbying the state and federal governments? Who have they hired? What does it get them?

44. Which lawmakers do the local companies care mostly deeply about? How do they show it?

LOBBYISTS

45. Which lobbyists are your lawmakers friends with?

46. Are there former residents from your area in the D.C. lobbying game? What about in the fundraising game?

47. Note the corporations reimbursed for travel on a lawmaker's campaign finance report. That means the lawmaker is being flown on a corporate jet, usually with a lobbyist on board.

OUTSIDE GROUPS

48. Which groups are spending money in your state or congressional races?

49. Are there any locally based 527 groups?

50. Are any local residents involved in ideological nonprofit organizations? While they do not have to disclose their donors, ask them for their financial backers.

WEB SITES YOU SHOULD KNOW:

www.opensecrets.org. The Center for Responsive Politics. Searchable database of campaign donations, classified by industry; also data on lawmakers' leadership PACs and their personal financial disclosure reports.

www.fecinfo.com. PoliticalMoneyLine's Web site has some free data, but you need to pay for most of the best stuff. They rank political action committee contributions and have a searchable database of lobbyists and lobby registrations.

www.publicintegrity.org. From the Center for Public Integrity, a free searchable lobbyist database and a separate database for 527 contributions.

www.followthemoney.org. The Institute on State Politics has databases of contributions to state candidates.

www.tpj.org. Texans for Public Justice has a list of President George W. Bush's biggest fund-raisers, sorted by name, company or economic interest.

sopr.senate.gov. A searchable database of federal Lobbying Disclosure Act records from the Secretary of the Senate.