

Local employers' PACs often give big bucks to congressional candidates

Matthew Daneman • Staff writer • March 7, 2010

ITT Industries really likes Jerry Lewis — the California congressman, not the comedian. Xerox Corp. is a fan of Rep. Louise Slaughter and ex-Rep. Christopher Shays. And Constellation Brands has a soft spot for Long Island's Steve Israel.

Those federal lawmakers were among the biggest recipients of donations from political action committees of companies that have a sizable Rochester-area presence, according to data from the Leadership Institute.

The politically conservative think-tank annually does an analysis of spending by corporate PACs. Its most recent analysis, released last week, covered the 2007-08 election cycle and giving by 1,036 PACs.

According to the analysis, incumbents typically picked up the vast majority of local companies' PAC giving. Contributions were split about evenly between Democrats and Republicans.

Corporate PACs typically get their money not from company coffers directly but from employees, said Lawrence Southwick Jr., professor emeritus in the School of Management at the State University of New York at Buffalo.

Such giving to candidates is an example of "rent seeking" — the economic term for trying to make money off the manipulation of an economy, Southwick said. "They're trying to get special favors for themselves and freeze other people out," he said.

At other times, Southwick said, corporate PACs will donate to particular candidates "in line with their particular goals."

Here's how local company PACs dispersed money in 2007-08:

- The Xerox Corp. Political Action Committee gave \$26,000 in 2007-08. The two largest recipients were Slaughter, D-Fairport, and Shays, a Connecticut Republican voted out of the House in 2008. Each received \$5,000 from the Xerox PAC.
- ITT's PAC bestowed its largest contributions, \$10,000 each, on Sen. Mark Warner, D-Va., and House members Lewis, a Republican from California, Peter Visclosky, D-Ind., and James Moran Jr., D-Va.
- The Eastman Kodak Co. Employee Political Action Committee donated \$219,500. Rep. Charles Rangel, D-Manhattan, who last week stepped down as chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee amid an ethics investigation, was the largest recipient at \$10,000.

Randy Kuhl, a Republican from Hammondsport, Steuben County, who lost his seat in 2008 after two terms, received \$7,000 from the Kodak PAC. Kuhl is considered a potential candidate for the seat again now that incumbent Democrat Eric Massa is resigning.

- Harris Corp.'s Federal Political Action Committee gave \$362,500, with Rep. Frank R. Wolf, R-Va., the largest recipient at \$10,000.
- JPMorgan Chase & Co. PAC and its Federal Political Action Committee combined gave \$940,940. The single largest donation,

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\$11,498, went to Sen. Saxby Chambliss, R-Ga.

- The Constellation Brands Inc. Political Action Committee gave \$145,000. While several candidates received \$10,000 donations, Steve Israel, a Democrat from Dix Hills, Suffolk County, received \$15,000. The U.S. Supreme Court earlier this year overturned a ban on direct spending by corporations in election campaigns. That ruling likely will not impact the role of PACs, Southwick said.

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