

## Oil, gas industry contributions keep pouring into New Mexico political war chests

Written by Kathleen Sabo Executive Director New Mexico Ethics Watch  
Friday, 13 November 2020 06:56

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Oil and gas-related interests have made nearly \$1.5 million in contributions to New Mexico political campaigns so far during the 2020 general election cycle, with about half of the money coming from out of state.

This is according to the most recent analysis by New Mexico Ethics Watch of general election campaign finance reports filed with the Office of the Secretary of State. The third and most recent reporting period ran from Oct. 6 through Oct. 27.

During this most recent time frame, the oil and gas industry spent more than \$321,000 on political activities in New Mexico. Most of those contributions came from New Mexico sources, though more than 38 percent of that amount came from out-of-state.

This ocean of money is flowing into New Mexico at a time when the per capita annual income of the average New Mexican, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, is just over \$26,000.

“Once again, oil and gas is playing a big role in financing legislative campaigns in this election,” Kathleen Sabo, executive director of New Mexico Ethics Watch said. “It will be interesting to see how much influence these contributions might have in next year’s Legislature.”

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New Mexico Ethics Watch's latest findings for the third general election reporting period include:

\* As was the case in previous reporting periods, Republicans by far benefited most from oil and gas contributions, with nearly 68 percent going to GOP candidates and committees. However, some of the largest recipients of these contributions went to Democratic party leaders in the legislature.

\* As usual, the latest reports show that the Yates family — which has been involved in the petroleum industry in New Mexico for decades — is a major force in campaign contributions in this state. Individual family members and their companies have contributed nearly \$287,000 during the entire election cycle. For the entire general election cycle, the top four individual oil and gas contributors are members of the Yates family.

In the most recent reporting period, various individuals from the family contributed more than \$15,000 to candidates here. Their companies also are huge contributors. These include Strata Production Company, (\$25,000 since Oct. 6); Petroleum Yates Inc (\$20,000); and The Jalapeño Corporation (\$16,000). The John A. Yates Sr. Trust contributed \$50,000 during the most recent reporting period.

\* The Democrat receiving the most oil and gas contributions in this general election cycle is House Speaker Brian Egolf of Santa Fe. Although he has the support of many environmental groups, Egolf's personal campaign reported \$4,500 from the industry in his most recent report for a cumulative total of \$20,000 for the general election cycle.

His Republican opponent, Raye Byford has received only \$1,000 from the industry, a contribution from Brewer Oil. The speaker's political action committee (PAC), the Brian Egolf Speaker Fund — which is used to fund Democratic House candidates — took in \$30,000 in oil money during the latest reporting period, for a cumulative total of \$56,000.

\* The candidate who received the most oil and gas contributions since Oct. 6 is incumbent state Sen. George Muñoz, a Gallup Democrat. He received \$8,500, from the industry according to his most recent report.

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During the 2020 primary, Muñoz was one of five incumbent Democratic state senators who received major support from the industry. He is the only one of those five who won their primary.

He faced Republican Angela Olive in Tuesday's election. Muñoz is a long-time recipient of the industry's money, having led all senators in oil and gas contributions in 2016. He received more than \$60,000 from the industry that election cycle.

\* Other top candidate recipients of oil and gas contributions in the most recent round of campaign finance reporting are incumbent Rep. Rebecca Dow, R-Truth or Consequences, (\$6,000);

Crystal Diamond, a Republican from Elephant Butte running for a state Senate seat, (\$6,000);

Republican Dinah Vargas of Albuquerque, who challenged incumbent Rep. Andres Romero (\$5,000);

Justin Salazar Torres of Española, who ran for an open House seat (\$5,000);

and Rep. Patricia Lundstrom, D-Gallup, who chairs the House Appropriations and Finance Committee (\$5,000).

\* The top contributors among oil and gas businesses during the general election have been Chevron (\$393,100);

Strata Production Company (\$73,000);

the John A. Yates, Sr. Trust (\$65,000);

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Marathon Oil Company (\$64,750);

and Occidental Petroleum (\$64,750).

The reports filed last week [Oct. 26] are the last ones required before the Nov. 3 election.

“Last minute” contributions won’t be known until the final reports, which are due by Jan. 7, 2021.

New Mexico Ethics Watch will analyze those reports as they become available, crunching the numbers on oil and gas and other industry contributions.

New Mexico Ethics Watch and Common Cause New Mexico collaborated on a comprehensive report on oil and gas industry involvement in financing political campaigns, from 2017 through 2019, earlier this year.

That report can be found at:

[http://nmethicswatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Oil-and-Gas-Report\\_05012020.pdf](http://nmethicswatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Oil-and-Gas-Report_05012020.pdf)

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