



Written by [Brian Koenig](#) on August 19, 2011

## Special Interest Groups Give Congressional Democrats \$15M in 2011

Congressional Democrats have brushed off President Obama's personal decree to swear off special-interest campaigning for his reelection bid. According to an Associated Press analysis on campaign fundraising, Democrats aspiring to regain control of the House in 2012 have pocketed more than \$15 million from political action committees this year, including donations from labor unions, sugar producers, and defense contractors. Over \$1 million alone went to campaign committees of House Minority Leaders Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif., left), Minority Whip Steny Hoyer (D-Md.), and DNC chairwoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz (D-Fla.).



Congressional Democrats condemn Republicans for special-interest campaigning, while pressuring GOP presidential hopefuls to disclose their top campaign donors. "The refusal to accept donations from federal lobbyists and PACs is critical to limiting the influence of special interests in the political process," Wasserman Schultz said in a recent conference call. "Unfortunately, every single Republican candidate for president today happily accepts donations from lobbyists and PACs."

Responding to the AP's analysis, DNC spokesman Alec Gerlach asserted, "Democrats have broadly supported campaign finance reform and disclosure for outside groups, while Republicans continue to oppose them."

President Obama has also been an outspoken critic of special-interest campaigning. "With its ruling today, the Supreme Court has given a green light to a new stampede of special interest money in our politics," Obama [lamented](#), in response to a Supreme Court decision on campaign finance limits. "It is a major victory for big oil, Wall Street banks, health insurance companies and the other powerful interests that marshal their power every day in Washington to drown out the voices of everyday Americans."

The President fought his 2008 presidential campaign with a vow to end "special-interest" politics; however, according to a [study](#) earlier this summer by iWatch News, "nearly 200 of his biggest donors have landed plum government jobs and advisory posts, won federal contracts worth millions of dollars for their business interests, or attended numerous elite White House meetings and social events."

iWatch labeled Obama's generous donors "bundlers," as they bundled together large sums of cash for his 2008 campaign. iWatch's investigation was thorough and explosive:

Overall, 184 of 556, or about one-third of Obama bundlers or their spouses joined the administration in some role. But the percentages are much higher for the big-dollar bundlers. Nearly 80 percent of those who collected more than \$500,000 for Obama took "key administration posts," as defined by the White House. More than half the 24 ambassador nominees who were



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bundlers raised \$500,000.

The big bundlers had broad access to the White House for meetings with top administration officials and glitzy social events. In all, campaign bundlers and their family members account for more than 3,000 White House meetings and visits. Half of them raised \$200,000 or more.

Some Obama bundlers have ties to companies that stand to gain financially from the president's policy agenda, particularly in clean energy and telecommunications, and some already have done so. Level 3 Communications, for instance, snared \$13.8 million in stimulus money.

A new study by MapLight, a nonpartisan watchdog group that tracks campaign financing, found that the bipartisan "super committee" — six Democrats and six Republicans — charged to find \$1.2 trillion in deficit savings, [raked in](#) nearly \$65 million from special-interest groups over the past decade.

Top industry donors were lawyers and law firms, [contributing](#) more than \$31.5 million. The second biggest industry gave \$11.2 million, donated by individuals in the securities and investment industry. Among the [top corporate donors](#) were Microsoft (\$810,000), General Electric (\$340,935), and some Wall Street banks, including Citigroup, Goldman Sachs, JPMorgan Chase, and Bank of America (a combined \$2 million in donations).

Of the two parties, the Democrats were much more profitable, racking up a total of \$42.7 million in donations — twice as much as Republican members.

Topping the list is Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.) — he received roughly \$15.8 million in political donations from special interest PACs, largely due to his unsuccessful presidential bid in 2004, says MapLight. Following close behind is Sen. Max Baucus (D-Mont.) with \$8.3 million. Rep. James Clyburn (D-S.C.) received \$5.9 million and Sen. Patty Murray (D-Wash.), got \$5.7 million, says MapLight.

As for the other Democrat members, Rep. Xavier Becerra (D-Calif.) received \$3.7 million, and Rep. Chris Van Hollen (D-Md.) got \$3.3 million.

The Republicans received \$21.9 million in PAC money over the last decade, MapLight's analysis shows. Rep. Fred Upton (R-Mich.) received \$4.1 million; Sen. Jon Kyl (R-Ariz.) \$3.7 million; Rep. Jeb Hensarling (R-Texas) \$3.1 million; Sen. Rob Portman (R-Ohio) got \$2.8 million; and Sen. Pat Toomey (R-Pa.) received \$2.4 million.

Special-interest groups surely have their prerogatives, as do their congressional patrons. But many would question the Democrats' charge, as they vehemently condemn what that they themselves indulge in. Indeed, the numbers show that Washington fundraising is bipartisan.



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