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April 28th, 2022

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New Mexico Politicians Directly Benefit from Oil & Gas Industry

Partly due to massive revenues from oil and gas operations in the state, New Mexico will start sending a one-time \$500 rebate to state taxpayers. But in addition to those checks, many politicians here already are benefiting in a more direct way from the oil and gas industry.

With the recent filing of the first campaign finance reports in the 2022 elections in New Mexico, it's clear that the oil and gas industry is continuing its tradition of generously contributing large amounts of campaign cash to candidates in this state.

According to an analysis of oil and gas contributions by New Mexico Ethics Watch, the industry – companies, political action committees and individuals – has contributed more than \$1.1 million to state politicians in the six month period from October 5, 2021 through April 4, 2022.

This initial round of reporting, not surprisingly, shows that candidates for governor are getting the lion's share of oil and gas contributions. Gubernatorial candidates received nearly \$500,000 of that \$1.1 million. The rest of the contributions mostly went to those running for legislative seats and for statewide offices.

The three top recipients of oil and gas money are gubernatorial candidates. Of these, Mark Ronchetti, one of five Republican candidates for that office, seems to be the industry's choice, at least for now. He reported just under \$300,000 in oil and gas money. Interests from this sector gave Ronchetti's chief GOP rival, state Rep. Rebecca Dow, more than \$122,000 for her campaign. Democratic incumbent Gov. Michelle Lujan-Grisham reported slightly less than \$66,000 in oil and gas contributions during the past reporting period.

Nearly 70 percent of the industry's contributions to candidates during this first primary reporting period went to Republicans. In 2020, GOP candidates received about 60 percent of oil and gas contributions in New Mexico.

In addition to their contributions to candidates running in 2022, the oil and gas industry gave more than \$145,000 to state senators – none of whom are up for election until 2024 – and state representatives who are not seeking re-election this year.

The largest oil and gas contributors in New Mexico so far are mostly familiar names. As was the case throughout the 2020 election cycle, the Chevron corporation contributed the most between October and April. The company gave more than \$71,000 during this first reporting period. Peyton Yates, founder and co-manager of Artesia's Santo Petroleum, contributed nearly \$66,000 during this time

Other top oil and gas contributors during the first reporting period include: Occidental Petroleum (\$60,413); Exxon (\$60,000); JR Water Transfer (\$50,000); NextEra Energy Resources (\$41,500); Conoco Phillips (\$37,850); Devon Energy (\$36,200); the John A. Yates Sr. Trust (\$35,800); and Marathon Oil Company (\$30,000).

During this initial reporting period, political action committees (PACs) associated with oil and gas contributed more than \$51,000 to New Mexico campaigns. PACs also received almost \$261,000 from the industry, more than half of which, \$135,000, went to the New Mexico House Republican Campaign Committee.

The largest PAC expenditure during the first reporting period was \$150,000, which New Mexico Strong, which has been funded mostly by Chevron, gave to the New Mexico Oil & Gas Association in February.

Between October 2021 and early April, almost 37 percent of oil and gas contributions to New Mexico campaigns came from out-of-state sources. That percentage is likely to change as the election progresses, however. For the 2020 election, just over 70 percent of oil and gas contributions came from out-of-state companies, committees and individuals.

Huge oil and gas industry contributions are nothing new for New Mexico. Although the state has a small population, in the 2020 election, the state ranked fifth in the amount of political contributions from oil and gas, according to statistics from FollowtheMoney.org. In terms of per capita oil and gas contributions, our state was second in 2020, behind only Alaska.

"New Mexico Ethics Watch will continue to analyze the oil and gas industry's campaign contributions, as well as those of other industries, throughout the year," noted Executive Director Kathleen Sabo. "The oil and gas industry plays an outsized role in the economic fortunes of New Mexico, and we believe citizens need to be aware of the industry's continuing influence upon our public officials."

Read our most recent report on this industry, please visit www.nmethicswatch.org/oil-and-gas-report-follow-up.html.