



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Oil and Gas Money Continues to Be a Primary Source of Campaign Contributions

While record-breaking heat continues to bake much of the U.S. and other parts of the world this summer – an uncomfortable reminder of the worsening effects of petroleum-fueled climate change -- oil and gas interests continue to pour vast amounts of cash into New Mexico political campaigns to advance and protect their interests.

The oil and gas industry contributed more than \$2.5 million to New Mexico candidates and political committees during the recent primary election season, which covers contributions from October 2021 until early July (nearly a month after the primary itself).

That's according to an analysis by New Mexico Ethics Watch, based on campaign finance reports submitted to the New Mexico Secretary of State's Office.

Republican Mark Ronchetti, who easily won the GOP gubernatorial primary in June, was by far the top recipient of oil and gas money during the primary cycle. The former television weatherman pulled in more than a half million dollars from oil and gas industry contributors, which was 21 percent of the total oil and gas money contributed during the primary campaign.

By comparison, Ronchetti's chief rival for the Republican nomination, state Rep. Rebecca Dow, R-Truth or Consequences, received just over \$154,000 from oil and gas sources in her unsuccessful race. The New Mexico House Republican Campaign Committee took in more than \$216,000 from oil and gas donors during the primary season.

Incumbent Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham, who had no challengers in the Democratic primary, received more than \$137,000 in oil and gas money, slightly more than a quarter of Ronchetti's total contributions from the industry.

Overall, the governor's race attracted the most contributions from oil and gas. About a third of their contributions went to gubernatorial candidates. State House of Representatives candidates received nearly 29 percent of the industry's contributions in the primary, while political action committees received slightly more than 26 percent.

Of the state representative candidates, incumbent Rep. Patricia Lundstrom, D-Gallup, who chairs the House Appropriations Committee, reported the most contributions from oil and gas. She received \$44,000 from the industry. The New Mexico Oil & Gas Association threw a fundraiser for Lundstrom at Chevron's Houston headquarters earlier this year. But Lundstrom's total was only \$1,000 more than the amount of oil and gas money contributed to Rep. Randall Pettigrew, R- Lovington.

As has been the case in recent years, the top oil and gas industry contributor during the primary was the Chevron corporation, handing out more than \$250,000 in contributions during the primary cycle.

Other major industry contributors were the Oklahoma-based Devon Energy, which contributed nearly \$122,000; Exxon, nearly \$104,000; Marathon Oil Company of Houston, more than \$86,000; and Occidental Petroleum, also based in Houston, which contributed more than \$81,000.

Earlier this year, after New Mexico Ethics Watch reported oil and gas political contributions from an early filing period, Larry Behrens, a spokesman for the pro-fossil fuel organization Power the Future, pushed back, saying our organization did not look at the political contributions of environmentalist groups.

In our recent examination of environmental group campaign spending in New Mexico, we found that their primary season political contributions came nowhere near the totals of the oil and gas industry for the same period. The environmentalists reported about \$160,000 in political contributions during the primary cycle – less than 7 percent of the oil and gas industry’s total.

The biggest player in this sector is Conservation Voters New Mexico. The group’s CVNM Action Fund contributed about \$44,000 in contributions during the primary. Another Conservation Voters PAC, Verde Voters, spent more than \$40,000 on campaign literature (and another \$11,000 on postage).

The Rio Grande Chapter of the Sierra Club made about \$2,000 in contributions to candidates, while the group’s Healthy Communities PAC spent nearly \$24,000 on campaign materials and in-kind contributions to various candidates during the primary. The national Sierra Club made a \$15,000 contribution to the Speaker Fund late last year. Another environmentalist group, the New Mexico Wild Action Fund spent less than \$12,000 in political contributions, while lobbyists for the group contributed another \$4,250 to candidates. Lobbyists for Natural Resources Defense Council spent less than \$3,700 on political contributions. Other lobbyists and officials from various environmental groups reported slightly more than \$3,000 in contributions during the primaries.

New Mexico Ethics Watch reached out to Mr. Behrens to confirm it had captured total primary spending by environmental groups. To date, we have not received a response from him.

“The overwhelming majority of scientists recognize the connection between fossil fuel use and climate change,” noted New Mexico Ethics Watch executive director Kathleen Sabo, “yet the oil and gas industry continues to press the case for increased oil and gas production in the state with minimal regulation, while contributing mightily to the state’s political candidates.”

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New Mexico Ethics Watch is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization and a principal leader in ethics reform in New Mexico. Our values are that ethics is for everyone; that good government leads to improved schools, healthier communities, and better business, and attention to ethics in public life leads to more equitable opportunities for all.

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