

# Big money flaunts its power at Republican convention

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The Republican convention in Philadelphia is taking place in the Comcast-Spectacor First Union Center, an arena which bears the name of a cable television company and a bank. Given the penchant for naming buildings, stadiums and events for the corporations that have paid for them, the conclave that nominates George W. Bush might properly be retitled the Motorola, AT&T, General Motors, Microsoft Republican National Convention.

The same title could be applied to the Democratic Party convention that will nominate Al Gore two weeks from now in Los Angeles, since each of these four companies also gave \$1 million to the Democrats. Or, for the sake of variety, the Los Angeles meeting might be named after other corporate sponsors and called the SBC, UPS, Lockheed Martin Democratic National Convention.

The two political conventions receive \$13.5 million each in federal funds, but this is barely a down payment on a total cost of well over \$100 million. The bulk of the funds come from donations from huge corporations, which quite openly buy access and influence with current and future officeholders in Washington.

Big money has always played an enormous role in both the Democratic and Republican parties. These two parties are, in the final analysis, political instruments of the capitalist ruling class, defending the profit system at home and the economic and strategic interests of American imperialism abroad. But never has corporate America exercised such unabashed dominance of American political life, and nowhere is this demonstrated so brazenly as at the national political conventions.

Each convention has an official airline (US Airways for the Republicans, United for the Democrats), an official transportation partner (GM for both) and a myriad of other corporate connections. In all, 10 companies are platinum (\$1 million) sponsors of the Republicans, and 11 gave a similar amount to the Democrats.

Philip Morris, the biggest tobacco company, laid out

\$618,000 for the Republicans. Lockheed Martin, which does 70 percent of its business with the federal government, is giving \$100,000 to each convention. Hugh Burns, a corporate spokesman, said the donation is “part of good government—we support the democratic process.”

The congressional Republican leadership has been kept out of the limelight during most of the convention, but has played a major role in the raising and expending of money. Nearly every ranking Republican leader or committee chairman has his own extravaganza paid for by one or another corporate donor.

House Speaker Dennis Hastert held an early-morning fly-fishing trip on the Delaware River, open only to corporations and individuals contributing more than \$1 million. Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott raised \$175,000 at a single \$1,000-per-ticket breakfast that featured vice-presidential nominee Richard Cheney. He also was guest of honor at the “Lott Hop,” one of six major events at the convention sponsored by AT&T.

A *Washington Post* columnist observed: “Rep. J.C. Watts is brought to you by DaimlerChrysler, the New York delegation comes courtesy of Merrill Lynch, House Speaker Denny Hastert is provided by Morgan Stanley, Rep. Bill Archer is sponsored by the Spirits Wholesalers of America, and the Commerce Committee is made possible by the American Chemistry Council.”

The biggest single congressional fundraiser is Minority Whip Tom DeLay, who has amassed nearly \$1 million from undisclosed sources to lavish on Republican members of Congress and other dignitaries during the convention week, providing hospitality lounges, concierge service and chauffeured cars.

At a Sunday night bash where DeLay was named “Man of the Year” by defense contractors Boeing and Lockheed-Martin, other corporate sponsors included Citigroup, Coastal Corp., Enron Corp., El Paso Energy and Reliant Energy—a bank and four energy companies.

Senator Rick Santorum of Pennsylvania raised nearly \$700,000 at seven fundraisers for his reelection campaign during convention week.

The California delegation, the convention's largest, held a huge reception at the now-closed Philadelphia Navy Yard, sponsored by United Airlines, General Dynamics and the American Chiropractors Association, among others.

The biggest single event was a luncheon gala for the Republican National Committee Wednesday that was initially budgeted at \$3 million and ended up raising over \$7 million.

Michael Saylor, billionaire CEO of MicroStrategy, complained to the *Post* that he had to ride an Amtrak train back to Washington from the convention after his air service told him that the glut of corporate jets at the Philadelphia airport would make it impossible to fly back. Every takeoff slot had been taken by other CEOs.

According to a report released August 1, some \$90 million of the \$137 million in soft money donations to the Republican Party have come from only 739 contributors, including 139 who gave over \$250,000. More than half of the 139 concealed their identities from the Federal Election Commission by breaking up their contributions into smaller amounts or routing the donations through third parties.

Big donors were given special privileges at the convention, rationed out according to the size of the donations. "Regents," those who gave more than \$250,000, have a go-anywhere pass that allows them into any party, hospitality box or dinner. Team 100 consists of those who gave \$100,000, followed by the Presidential Trust (\$20,000) and the "Eagles" (\$15,000).



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