

TOP STORY

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Donors hedge bets in VA gov's race

By Maggie Souza, Special to Stateline.org

Hundreds of campaign donors knew all along they were backing a winner in this year's race for governor of Virginia. They took no chances with their support, giving money to both Republican candidate Jerry Kilgore and Democratic nominee Tim Kaine.

In all, 338 contributors gave to both major-party gubernatorial contestants. Kilgore got almost \$2.6 million from these dual-donors; Kaine, who eventually won the Nov. 8 election, received nearly \$1.9 million.

For example, the Virginia Automobile Dealers Association spent a total of \$198,611 on the race. The trade group gave \$101,711 to Kilgore and \$96,900 to Kaine, according to the Virginia Public Access Project, which compiles campaign finance data and posts it on the web at www.vpap.org.

The statistics cover the 2005 election cycle – from Jan. 1, 2002, through Dec. 1, 2005, the end of the most recent reporting period. According to the project's data, other top dual-donors included:

- Energy powerhouse Dominion, which gave \$98,741 to Kilgore and \$88,000 to Kaine.
- Alpha Natural Resources, a coal producer, which gave \$192,140 to Kilgore but just \$10,000 to Kaine.
- The Altria Group, the parent company of Philip Morris, which gave \$97,708 to Kilgore and \$80,000 to Kaine.

Campaign finance experts say it's not unusual for donors to give to both sides, especially in a close race. During most of the gubernatorial campaign, the polls predicted a close election. Kaine won with 52 percent of the vote; Kilgore had 46 percent; and independent candidate H. Russell Potts got 2 percent.

"Often, business donors will give to both parties," said Larry Noble, executive director of the Center for Responsive Politics in Washington. The center is a nonpartisan, nonprofit research group that studies how money affects elections and public policy.

"Companies often want to make sure that whoever gets into power, they'll have access to when they have a piece of legislation they're concerned about, when they need to lobby, when they're concerned about what the government is doing," Noble said.

"So companies are more likely to give to both Democrats and Republicans."

Indeed, most of the dual-donors will have big stakes in legislative and regulatory matters during Kaine's four years as governor. Utilities, health care groups, car dealers, Altria and technology firms often lobby long and hard at the Capitol.

The list of dual-donors represents a Who's Who of corporate Virginia. It includes Universal Leaf Tobacco Co. (\$32,000 to Kaine, \$11,000 to Kilgore); Overnite Transportation Co. (\$27,500 to Kaine, \$19,000 to Kilgore); Norfolk Southern Corp. (\$20,000 to Kaine, \$13,500 to Kilgore); Capital One (\$19,750 to Kaine, \$25,000 to Kilgore); Verizon (\$10,000 to Kaine, \$55,000 to Kilgore); LandAmerica Financial Group (\$5,000 to Kaine, \$7,500 to Kilgore); Circuit City Stores (\$5,000 to Kaine, \$6,950 to Kilgore); Bank of America (\$3,000 to Kaine, \$53,740 to Kilgore); and Wachovia (\$9,000 to both Kaine and Kilgore).

The 2005 campaign was the most expensive gubernatorial race in Virginia history. Kaine raised \$20.1 million, Kilgore \$24.5 million and Potts \$1.3 million – for a total of \$46 million. Contributions from the dual-donors made up about 10 percent of the total.

Twelve donors gave to all three gubernatorial candidates. The Virginia Medical Society, for instance, gave \$10,000 to Kaine, \$10,000 to Kilgore and \$7,000 to Potts; the Virginia Nurses Association gave \$1,000 to each candidate; and the Virginia State Police Association gave \$13,900 to Kaine, \$18,500 to Kilgore and \$500 to Potts.

Michael Allen, director of public affairs for the Virginia Auto Dealers Association, said his group gave to Kilgore and Kaine because both candidates were pro-business.

“The only thing we're really looking for is to support those people who are willing to listen to our position,” Allen said.

As individuals, car dealers may have strong personal opinions about hot-button social issues like abortion rights and gun control. But Allen said his association concentrates only on matters that pertain to Virginia's automotive industry. “We're very focused,” he said.

He stressed that the association does not donate because it expects the candidates to vote one way or the other.

“There have been lobbyists who say, ‘Well, we only support those candidates who vote for our bills,’” Allen said. “At that point, what you're asking for basically is a legislator to sell their vote.

“And we believe that to be highly unethical.”

Altria and Dominion did not respond to repeated requests for comment on their donations.

Larry Noble said business donors can often be described as “pragmatic” because they want access to government, no matter who wins an election.

“Even within that pragmatism, many businesses tend to have a pro-Republican bias because they perceive the Republican Party as being more pro-business,” Noble said. “But again, they want to make sure that if a Democrat wins, they are not left out in the cold.”

Noble noted that the voters have the final say on Election Day. “Ultimately, no matter what the businesses give, no matter what their financial support is, it's the voters who decide.”

However, by donating to the winning candidate, a business can ensure that it has a friendly ear in the halls of government. “Even though the company can’t vote itself, it has a tremendous amount influence after the election because of the financial support it provided. And that means it usually has more influence than the individual voter,” Noble said.

He said people need to be aware of where campaign donations come from, what the givers want and how money influences public policy.

“The voters can’t forget the fact that their votes do count,” Noble said. “And so the best way for people to speak is through their votes.”

Maggie Souza is a Virginia Commonwealth University journalism student.

Meet the \$15,000-\$15,000 Club

Here are donors who gave at least \$15,000 to both Democrat Tim Kaine, winner of the Nov. 8 election for governor, and Jerry Kilgore, his Republican opponent. The top dual-donors included 19 business groups and two individuals: Ted Weschler, a financial adviser in Charlottesville, and Randal (cq) J. Kirk, chief executive officer of New River Pharmaceuticals. For example, Kirk gave \$50,000 to Kilgore’s campaign between 2002 and 2004; however, in August 2005, he threw his support and \$100,000 to Kaine.

Donor	Total given to Kaine	Total given to Kilgor
Randal (cq) Kirk, pharmaceutical executive, Radford	\$100,000	\$50,
Virginia Auto Dealers Association, Richmond	\$96,900	\$101,
Dominion electric utility, Richmond	\$88,000	\$98,
Altria, Philip Morris’ parent company, Richmond	\$80,000	\$97,
Virginia Hospital and Healthcare Association, Richmond	\$53,500	\$50,
Nortel Networks Inc., Washington, D.C.	\$47,699	\$35,
Microsoft Corp., Redmond, Wash.	\$42,890	\$48,
CGI - American Management Systems, Fairfax	\$40,000	\$37,
Sprint Nextel, Reston, N.C.	\$34,453	\$39,
Anheuser-Busch, St. Louis	\$32,500	\$32,
Comcast Corp., Philadelphia	\$30,500	\$30,
Armada/Hoffler Enterprises Inc., Chesapeake	\$30,000	\$40,
Overnite Transportation, Richmond	\$27,500	\$19,
Northrop Grumman - Newport News Shipbuilding	\$25,000	\$25,
FHC Health Systems, Norfolk	\$25,000	\$20,
Anthem Heath Plans, Richmond	\$24,000	\$37,
Hunton & Williams law firm, Richmond	\$24,000	\$30,
Troutman Sanders law firm, Richmond	\$24,000	\$29,
McGuire Woods law firm, Richmond	\$21,500	\$23,
Ted Weschler, financial adviser, Charlottesville	\$20,000	\$23,
Capital One, Falls Church	\$19,750	\$25,

Total for the 338 donors who gave to both Kaine and Kilgore	\$1,891,732	\$2,571,
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Source: Analysis of data from the Virginia Public Access Project [www.vpap.org]. The data covered contributions received between Jan. 1, 2002, and Dec. 1, 2005.

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