***Editor’s note:****This column is provided to Wisconsin Newspaper Association members by WisPolitics.com. Proper attribution to WisPolitics.com is appreciated. Also, please publish the tagline that is included at the end of the column.*

**Wisconsin members of Congress receive nearly $500K from industries they help regulate**

Wisconsin federal lawmakers this year received nearly half a million dollars from industries they help regulate, according to a WisPolitics.com review of campaign finance reports.

The review, published Oct. 24, checked contributions received between Jan. 1 and Sept. 30 from corporate PACs against Wisconsin Congressmembers’ committee assignments to examine if companies influenced by the panels financially supported the campaigns of its members.

It found three-quarters of the $495,000 total from corporate PACs comes from contributions to two Republicans responsible for writing laws that govern financial institutions and the insurance market: U.S. Reps. Bryan Steil of Janesville; and Sean Duffy of Weston, [who resigned his seat in mid-September](https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/politics/2019/08/26/sean-duffy-says-hes-leaving-congress-september/2120442001/).

Funds donated to U.S. Sens. Ron Johnson, R-Oshkosh, and Tammy Baldwin, D-Madison, and U.S. Rep. Mike Gallagher, R-Green Bay, rounded out the remaining 25%.

Reps. Glenn Grothman, R-Glenbeulah, Gwen Moore, D-Milwaukee, Ron Kind, D-La Crosse, and Mark Pocan, D-Town of Vermont sit on panels with jurisdiction too broad to explicitly link contributions to policy decisions or on committees that deal with functions of government, not the private sector.

Grothman, for example, is a member of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, which is charged with conducting investigations into government malfeasance, and the Education and Labor Committee, the latter of which reaches into nearly every aspect of private-sector business.

Similarly, Moore and Kind sit on the powerful Ways and Means Committee which has jurisdiction over “all taxation, tariffs, and other revenue-raising measures,” a broad mandate that affects nearly all lines of work.

Steil is a member of the House Financial Services Committee, which develops policy that governs banks and insurance companies, while Duffy sat on the committee while he was in Congress.

Steil raised $240,250 from PACs representing businesses in the financial services and insurance industries, a total that is just under a fifth of the cash he has pulled in so far this year.

Under FEC guidelines, candidates can receive up to $5,000 for an election, with primaries and generals counting separately. Under those restrictions, PACS can donate up to $10,000 to a candidate’s committee each election cycle.

An FEC spokesman told WisPolitics.com are no legal restrictions on lawmakers receiving donations from PACs that represent industries they play a role in regulating.

Still, a spokesman for the Center for Responsive Politics said such fundraising raised ethical questions and added providing transparency to campaign finance was “the reason we exist.”

But when quizzed by WisPolitics.com about potential ethical issues, Steil defended the haul.

“Employers like Northwestern Mutual, American Family, Sentry, and Accuity provide thousands of family-supporting jobs in Southeast Wisconsin and I am proud to have the support of so many people working there,” he said in a statement.

Steil has so far received:

* $9,500 from the Council of Insurance Agents & Brokers;
* $7,000 from Northwestern Mutual and Goldman Sachs;
* and $6,000 from Ally Bank, New York Life Insurance company and the National Association of Insurance and Financial Advisors.

The Janesville Republican also received $12,000 from the accounting firm Ernst & Young this year, though $5,000 of that total was specifically earmarked for paying off debt the Steil campaign accrued during the 2018 cycle.

Duffy, meanwhile, received $130,500 this year from financial and insurance PACS, which represents roughly 16% of his total fundraising haul. He received $5,000 each from Capital One, Experian, Liberty Mutual Insurance and Experian, among others.

For comparison, freshman Democratic U.S. Rep. Jennifer Wexton of Virginia, who sits on the Financial Services Committee, pulled in $58,500 from PACs representing banks and insurance companies, which represents 4% of her total fundraising effort this year.

Other freshmen on the committee, such as U.S. Reps. Dean Phillips of Minnesota and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York, did not have PAC contributions from financial institutions or insurance companies.

Still, some of the top financial services PACs also made sizeable contributions to the Wisconsin delegation’s Democrats. Kind received $25,000 from Steil’s top 10 financial and insurance donors, including $5,000 from Ernst & Young, $4,500 from Northwestern Mutual and $5,000 from New York Life, among others.

Moore received $15,500 from those 10 donors, including $5,000 from Northwestern Mutual, $2,500 from Ernst & Young and $1,000 from Goldman Sachs.

Rep. Mike Gallagher — who sits on the Armed Services and Transportation and Infrastructure committees — received the next highest total, pulling in $85,750 from companies under the jurisdiction of those two panels.

On the Armed Services side, Gallagher received $37,250 in contributions, including the maximum $10,000 from Raytheon, $6,000 from Lockheed Martin and $5,500 from Northrop Grumman. He also received $48,000 from companies that are regulated by legislation crafted in the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee.

On the other side of the U.S. Capitol, only one of the four committees Johnson sits on plays a role in regulating private industry.

The WisPolitics.com review found the Oshkosh Republican received $29,000 from PACs representing industries with business before the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee. That included donations of $10,000 from the National Star Route Mail Contractors Association, $5,000 from Delta Airlines and $4,500 from the FAA Managers Association.

Baldwin also sits on the Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee and raised $3,000 from three separate $1,000 donations from industry-aligned PACs. The Madison Democrat — who also sits on the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee — raised $6,500 from PACs representing medical groups, including $2,000 from the American Chiropractic Association and $1,500 American College of Surgeons Professional Association.

Johnson’s haul represents 26% of the funds he has raised so far this year. For Baldwin, the total is less than 1%.

A spokesman for Johnson’s campaign replied “no” when asked by WisPolitics.com if it was problematic, ethically or otherwise, for a quarter of the senator’s campaign funds raised this year to come from industries he plays a role in regulating.

*The Capitol Report is written by editorial staff at WisPolitics.com, a nonpartisan, Madison-based news service that specializes in coverage of government and politics, and is distributed for publication by members of the Wisconsin Newspaper Association.*

*Copyright © WisPolitics.com*