

# Political action committees spend more than \$425,000 on Sparks' and Walker's campaigns, yet lose

BY MARK HEDIN AND JONATHAN NEWMAN

**R**EAL estate interests and labor organizations, using political action committees, a loosely regulated mechanism, were the biggest spenders in the most recent election.

PACs contributed more to four campaigns for supervisor in District 6 than the district's 14 candidates combined received from any other sources, \$439,773 or more than 35% of the \$1,243,882 total candidate spending in the November election.

Citywide in the four supervisorial races, PAC funding, one of three funding mechanisms available to campaigns, totaled \$1.5 million, meaning District 6 candidates got more than their share, nearly 30% of PAC money spent citywide in the 2010 races.

PACs operate under a different set of rules than individual contributors, and sometimes feature extravagant and loosely regulated spending. Record-keeping and filing requirements are such that tracking PACs requires a lot of time and tenacity. The Extra's numbers come from Ethics Commission campaign filings through Jan. 31, 2011, the candidates' and PACs' final report deadline.

### WHY SPECIAL INTERESTS LIKE PACS

A key aspect of PAC campaign financing is that there is no limit to how much individuals, corporations and special interests can spend trying to influence voters through a committee. Candidates are allowed to take no more than \$500 from an individual, but that same person contributing to a PAC is free to spend \$5,000 — or even \$45,000 — to boost a candidate or tear down a rival. In District 6's supervisorial campaign, two individuals spent exactly those sums.

Former Mayor Willie Brown donated \$5,000 to New Day for SF, a PAC that raised \$30,200 to support Jane Kim, the winner. And real estate mogul Thomas J. Coates, the city's top PAC contributor who also chucked in six figures in District 2, gave \$45,000 to support Theresa Sparks. Neither Brown

nor Coates returned The Extra's calls to ask why they care so much about District 6 and why they backed their respective candidates.

Of the four District 6 candidates with PAC money, Sparks and Debra Walker combined took in more than \$425,000 in funds from a dozen PACs. winner Kim got 7% as much from a single PAC. Contrast this, too, with what all 14 District 6 candidates received in direct contributions — \$401,230 — and in city matching funds — \$403,163 — that just six candidates qualified for: James Keys, Kim, Jim Meko, Sparks, Walker and Elaine Zamora.

State election law insists PACs operate independently of the candidates they support — or oppose. If the candidate or candidate's staff participates in "making any decision about the content, timing, location, mode, intended audience, distribution, or placement of the communication" — a hit piece, for instance — it is deemed a campaign contribution, and thus can't exceed \$500.

But a PAC — which can be, and sometimes is an individual — is allowed to interview the candidate on issues affecting the PAC, obtain campaign material from the candidate or candidate's "agents," or invite the candidate to make a presentation to them or their "employees, shareholders or family," provided there's no discussion about the expenditures to be made on the candidate's behalf.

### WILLIE BROWN NO. 2 CONTRIBUTOR

New Day for SF, to which former Mayor Brown chipped in \$5,000 — making him the second-largest individual contributor in District 6 — ran afoul of those rules early on, when its treasurer listed a phone number for Left Coast Communications as the PAC's contact number in Ethics Commission filings. Left Coast was Kim's campaign consultant, thus prohibited from PAC activity on her behalf.

The fourth and final District 6 supervisorial candidate to get PAC support was Keys, on whose behalf the Coleman Action Fund for Children Committee spent \$284. Coleman sent the same amount to Walker and Kim in District 6, to four

Board of Education candidates and to supervisorial candidates in Districts 8 and 10 as well.

PAC money flowed freely in District 2. In mid-October, Coates coughed up \$141,000 for a PAC called "Common Sense Voters San Francisco 2010, Vote for Mark Farrell for District 2 Supervisor." This is the same Coates who in 2008 gave \$1 million to state Prop. 98, a losing bid to repeal rent control.

Another big Common Sense PAC benefactor was socialite fundraiser Dede Wilsey, who, city Ethics Commission records show, shelled out \$50,000 to help beat Farrell's rival Janet Reilly.

Final Common Sense filings show numerous five-figure expenditures for campaign materials opposing Reilly, as well as a \$5,000 contribution that was funneled to the "San Francisco Republican County Central Committee Political Party Committee."

Reilly got the most first-place votes, but Farrell won his seat on second- and third-choice voting.

### REAL ESTATE INTERESTS WENT FOR SPARKS

In District 6, real estate interests went for Sparks. Coates' \$45,000 contribution to her cause was made through the Alliance for Jobs and Sustainable Growth PAC, which raised an additional \$45,000 for Sparks from the Building Owners and Managers Association of San Francisco. The Alliance ultimately spent \$176,800 in a fruitless attempt to persuade District 6 voters to support the Human Rights Commission executive director. This PAC also spent \$193,199 on District 8 winner Scott Wiener and \$184,303 on District 10 also-ran Steve Moss, publisher of the Potrero View. Coates gave \$10,000 to the PAC for Wiener and \$45,000 for Moss.

Another PAC that went to bat for Sparks was the Coalition for Sensible Government, funded by the San Francisco Association of Realtors, which shelled out more than \$30,000 for Sparks — and nearly \$60,000 for Wiener.

PACs supporting Walker tended to be labor-oriented. The Friends Supporting Debra Walker PAC

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61706	ESL Beginning Low 2	M-F	10:00 a.m.	12 noon	1-Jun	1850 Mission St.
62472	ESL Comm Skills for Work.	M-F	9:00 a.m.	10:00 a.m.	1-Jun	1850 Mission St.
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61908	ESL Comp. Assisted-Beg H	M-F	1:30 p.m.	3:00 p.m.	1-Jun	1850 Mission St.
61418	ESL Intermediate Low 6	M-Th	8:30 a.m.	11:00 a.m.	1-Jun	750 Eddy St.
61172	ESL Intermediate Low 6	M-Th	11:00 a.m.	1:30 p.m.	1-Jun	750 Eddy St.
61464	ESL Intermediate Low 6	M-Th	6:30 p.m.	9:00 p.m.	1-Jun	750 Eddy St.
61866	ESL Literacy A	M-Th	11:00 a.m.	1:30 p.m.	1-Jun	750 Eddy St.
62009	ESL Literacy A	M-Th	8:30 a.m.	10:30 a.m.	1-Jun	750 Eddy St.
62466	VES Beginning-Low L	M-F	9:00 a.m.	11:00 a.m.	1-Jun	1850 Mission St.
62467	VESL Beginning-Low	M-F	9:00 a.m.	10:00 a.m.	1-Jun	1850 Mission St.
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