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## PAC donations from Utah raise doubts in Maine

By KEVIN WACK, Staff Writer

Portland Press Herald / Maine Sunday Telegram

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Sunday, May 6, 2007

### **BIGGEST PAC CONTRIBUTORS TO 2006 GOVERNOR'S RACE**

DEMOCRATIC GOVERNORS  
ASSOCIATION -- MAINE PAC:

- 1) National Education  
Association, Washington --  
\$100,000
- 2) American Federation of State,  
County and Municipal Employees,  
Washington -- \$80,000
- 3) AFL-CIO, Washington --  
\$75,000
- 4) Service Employees  
International Union, Washington  
-- \$50,000
- 5) CRI, Atlanta -- \$50,000
- 6) International Union of Painters  
and Allied Trades, Washington --  
\$50,000
- 7) Ovations, Minneapolis --  
\$45,000
- 8) United Auto Workers, Detroit -  
- \$25,000
- 8) Mylan Laboratories,  
Canonsburg, Pa. -- \$25,000

At \$250,000, it was the largest private contribution of the 2006 Maine governor's race, helping to pay for TV commercials supporting Republican Chandler Woodcock in his bid to unseat Democratic Gov. John Baldacci.

But the money didn't come from a donor in Portland, Lewiston or Bangor. State records show that it came from a small city near Zion National Park in southwestern Utah, from a contributor listed as RECAF Inc.

What is RECAF Inc.? And why did it donate \$250,000 to a political action committee established in Maine by the national Republican Governors Association?

There is no sign of any such company at the firm's listed address. But the paper trail links RECAF to a controversial network of treatment centers for troubled teenagers affiliated with Robert B. Lichfield, a fundraiser for Republican Mitt Romney's presidential campaign.

Among Maine political contributions, the RECAF payment stands out. It raises questions about the effectiveness of both Maine's Clean Elections law, which is designed to reduce the influence of money in politics, and of disclosure requirements, which are meant to identify donors to the public.

And it illustrates how the stream of unregulated money through the U.S. electoral system allows out-of-state donors with no apparent stake to have the potential to shape the outcome of Maine elections.

"There are always opportunities out there for contributors who are willing to shell out the cash," said Rachel Weiss, spokeswoman for the Institute on Money in State Politics, a nonpartisan group based in Helena, Mont.

10) Anheuser-Busch, St. Louis -- \$15,000

RGMA MAINE PAC (REPUBLICAN GOVERNORS ASSOCIATION)

1) RECAF Inc., La Verkin, Utah -- \$225,000

2) United Sugar Corp., Clewiston, Fla. -- \$83,000

3) Novartis Pharmaceuticals, East Hanover, N.J. -- \$65,000

4) ATA & Affiliates, Alexandria, Va. -- \$25,000

4) Coca-Cola Co., Atlanta -- \$25,000

4) RECAF Inc., La Verkin, Utah -- \$25,000

4) MedImpact Healthcare Systems, San Diego -- \$25,000

4) Oracle USA, Washington -- \$25,000

9) International Association of Firefighters, Washington -- \$22,000

10) Pfizer, Inc., Schaumburg, Ill. -- \$20,000

*Source: Maine ethics commission (www.maine campaignfinance.com/public)*

## SIGNIFICANT GOP DONOR

Lichfield, 53, describes himself on campaign disclosure forms as a self-employed consultant. But he's more than that.

He's also a trustee in the World Wide Association of Specialty Programs and Schools, a Utah-based organization affiliated with residential youth treatment centers around the country and abroad. The association has been the defendant in multiple lawsuits alleging abuse of children, a charge the association has denied.

In recent years, Lichfield has become a significant financial force in GOP circles, giving hundreds of thousands of dollars to Republicans in Utah and elsewhere.

In 2004, the Salt Lake Tribune reported that campaign contributions by Lichfield and his family and business associates totaled \$1.01 million during the 2002 and 2004 elections.

The same story reported that a Utah bill that would have allowed state regulation of boarding schools for troubled teenagers was killed six days before Lichfield gave Utah House Speaker Marty Stephens a \$30,000 contribution for his gubernatorial campaign.

Lichfield did not respond to repeated requests for an interview. In 2004, he spoke with the Salt Lake Tribune and explained his political contributions this way: "We've been abundantly blessed, and when you're blessed, we feel you have a responsibility to bless others."

Unlike in Utah, there is no obvious connection between Lichfield's business interests and public policy in the state of Maine.

No youth treatment facilities known to be associated with Lichfield are located here, and state officials say they do not place Maine children in any such facilities out of state.

However, there are links between Lichfield and Romney, who last fall was chairman of the Republican Governors Association, the group whose Maine-based PAC received the \$250,000 contribution from RECAF.

Romney's job with the governors association included raising money on behalf of GOP gubernatorial candidates across the

country.

Lichfield is now serving as co-chairman of the Utah finance committee for Romney's presidential campaign, which has an early fundraising lead over the other GOP contenders.

In February, Lichfield helped organize a \$1,000-per-plate breakfast for the former Massachusetts governor.

Romney spokeswoman Sarah Pompei declined to say whether Romney was involved in soliciting RECAF's contribution to the Maine governor's race.

In an e-mailed statement, she downplayed the connection between Romney and the donor.

"Mr. Lichfield has donated to numerous Republican candidates and committees," Pompei said in the statement, "and is just one of more than 34,000 donors to Governor Romney's campaign."

She referred other questions to the Washington-based Republican Governors Association, whose

executive director, Nick Ayers, also declined to comment.

The RECAF contribution appears to fit a pattern in which party officials direct deep-pocketed party loyalists to give to specific races, Weiss said.

"You may not have a particular interest in that particular state," she said. "The party may say, 'These are the states we're kind of focusing on.'"

#### THE GOP PAC

Last fall's race between Woodcock, Baldacci, Green Independent Pat LaMarche and independent Barbara Merrill was watched closely by the Republican Governors Association, since Baldacci was seen as vulnerable in his re-election bid.

Unlike Baldacci, whose campaign was privately financed, Woodcock accepted public financing, so he was barred from receiving private contributions.

However, no such fundraising limits apply in Maine to political action committees. Their only limits are the size of contributors' wallets and their willingness to give.

The Republican Governors Association established its Maine PAC on Aug. 8, 2006.

According to campaign finance reports, its first contribution arrived on Aug. 24, a \$225,000 payment from RECAF. A second RECAF payment of \$25,000 came on Sept. 7.

Taken together, the two contributions were more than twice as big as the next-largest contributions, Republican or Democratic, involving the Maine governor's race.

During September, the Republican governors PAC took to the airwaves in Maine with a series of TV ads that criticized Baldacci while portraying Woodcock in a positive light.

"Chandler Woodcock's experience means new solutions for Maine's future," said the announcer in one of the commercials.

LaMarche, the Green Independent candidate, believed that these commercials and others by the Democrats should have triggered matching funds for herself and other taxpayer-funded candidates.

She filed a complaint with the Maine Commission on Governmental Ethics and Reform, arguing that the ads advocated for specific candidates.

But the ethics commission concluded that none of the ads expressly supported a clearly identified candidate. The state Supreme Judicial Court upheld that decision.

On Oct. 18, 2006, Romney arrived in Maine to stump for Woodcock. During a campaign stop in Westbrook, Romney said he would make sure that "hundreds of thousands of dollars" were spent on Woodcock's behalf.

By the end of the campaign, the GOP governors PAC in Maine had collected about \$714,000, more than one-third of which came from RECAF.

Woodcock, who lost to Baldacci by about 10 percentage points, referred questions about the RECAF contribution to Chris Jackson, his former campaign manager.

Jackson said he had never heard of RECAF Inc., but he emphasized that the Woodcock campaign, which received around \$1.1 million in taxpayer funds, did not coordinate with the Republican Governors Association.

"We don't have the first clue about how they raised their money or where their money came from," Jackson said.

He pointed out that the PAC's spending was legal.

"As long as the laws are written the way they're written, that's just the way it is," he said.

## POSSIBLE VIOLATION

Still, there are questions about whether the reporting of the RECAF contribution violated Maine law.

It is a criminal misdemeanor, or a civil violation punishable by a fine of up to \$500, for a Maine political action committee to accept a campaign contribution from one entity and report it in the name of another, according to Jonathan Wayne, executive director of the state ethics commission.

The same penalties apply to any false statement made in campaign disclosure reports. In this case, the address listed for RECAF is 170 N. State St. in La Verkin, Utah.

However, the entire 100 block of North State Street is occupied by Cross Creek Programs, a youth treatment center that sits on land owned by a partnership in Lichfield's name.

There is no sign for RECAF outside the Cross Creek complex, and no evidence of a street address at 170 N. State. People working at Cross Creek expressed bafflement when asked about RECAF.

After being told that the newspaper could not find any sign of RECAF Inc. at the Utah address reported to the state, Wayne said that he plans to write a letter to the GOP political action committee asking it to clarify whether the contributor's name and address were accurately reported, as state law requires.

"Based on what I've heard so far, I would say it sounds like a matter of concern," Wayne said.

The rationale behind disclosure requirements is straightforward: While every American has the right to spend their own money in political races, the public also has a right to know who's giving, since contributions often lead to political access.

"If you're hiding your identity and you're trying to make a political change occur, to me that's counter to a democracy," LaMarche said.

Even if the Maine ethics commission finds that the RECAF contribution was reported accurately, the case stands as an example of a larger phenomenon: money flowing through the gaps in campaign-finance restrictions.

Maine has a \$500 limit on individual contributions to gubernatorial candidates, but it is one of only 13 states that does not limit the size of contributions to political action committees.

House Speaker Glenn Cummings, D-Portland, has filed a bill that would cap PAC contributions at \$7,500, though some believe that such a limit would simply lead to cash being routed through different channels.

"Money always finds the path of least resistance," said Massie Ritsch, a spokesman for the Center for Responsive Politics, a nonpartisan group in Washington, D.C., that tracks money in politics.

RECAF was not the only large out-of-state contributor during last year's race for governor. National labor unions made big contributions to Democratic political action committees, getting around the cap on contributions to Baldacci's privately financed re-election campaign, and corporations gave large sums to the Republican PAC.

Merrill, the independent candidate for governor in 2006, said these contributions expose what she believes is the biggest loophole in Maine's Clean Elections law: Parties can raise unlimited sums and spend that money in support of candidates who are barred from private fundraising.

Merrill blames the two major political parties for the current situation.

"I just think both of the parties have made a complete farce out of the Clean Elections law," she said.

-- Staff Researcher Julia McCue contributed to this report

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## Reader comments

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**bevan straut** of wqeww, ME  
Aug 6, 2008 1:18 AM

Teen High School teens schools are those schools where the students can gain knowledge and awareness about the whole world. Every student should be aware about the things going on. In these schools students can understand the country economy and the reasons of growth.  
<http://www.teensprivateschools.com/>

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**Jim Fossel** of Alna, ME  
May 26, 2007 8:55 AM

Ahh, Mitch, so if I disagree with you I must have misinterpreted. How very arrogant - you sound like Bush.

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**Jim Fossel** of Alna, ME  
May 26, 2007 8:53 AM

Mitch:

"Democracy should never be for sale to the highest bidder" is a nonsense BS phrase that means nothing. Generally it means that one doesn't want the candidates with whom they disagree getting contributions.

"There are very few non-extremely wealthy people in our Federal legislature, and most are from big business and law backgrounds." Prove it. Or do you always make sweeping generalizations without any evidence to back you up? Oh, of course you do.

Rick: I'm glad you're from Virginia. We don't need close-minded people like you in Maine.

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**Jim Fossel** of Alna, ME  
May 26, 2007 8:49 AM

Rick, you're projecting. I never attack sane people.

Ahh yes, because I support free speech and democracy I'm a fan of lobbyists. There's a logical leap - or is logic too big a word for you?

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