



Rob Portman, Lee Fisher: Who are their biggest contributors, and what do they want?

Published: Monday, September 13, 2010, 7:00 AM



Stephen Koff, The Plain Dealer

Washington --One relies on Wall Street, the other on trial lawyers. This is more than just a claim in the increasingly bitter November contest between Rob Portman, a Republican, and Lee Fisher, a Democrat, veteran politicians vying to be the next junior U.S. senator from Ohio.

Like anyone running a multi-million-dollar campaign, each has tapped into special interests. Portman has raised a lot more cash altogether -- \$10.7 million, to Fisher's \$4.9 million, as of their last finance reports -- but Fisher, too, relies on select constituencies.

Who are their biggest contributors, what do they want from Congress, and what do their favored candidates say about those issues? The Plain Dealer, with an assist from the Center for Responsive Politics, took a look.



Joshua Gunter, The Plain Dealer

U.S. Senate candidate Rob Portman (right) talks with Gary Gibb, owner of Wrayco Industries, at the Stow plant on Sept. 9, 2010.

ROB PORTMAN:

1. SECURITIES, INVESTMENT AND FINANCE: \$861,033

Top donor employers/groups: FMR Corp. (\$37,200), Elliott Management (\$34,342), Jones Financial Cos. (\$27,382), Reynolds, DeWitt & Co. (\$19,200), KKR & Co. (\$18,566).

What they want: Wall Street dislikes the Democratic-backed financial reforms of 2010 and loathes the prospect of higher taxes on families earning more than \$250,000. Brokerages and mutual fund firms including FMR (you know it as Fidelity Investments) and Jones Financial (better known as Edward Jones & Co.) are keeping an eye on how Washington treats credit derivatives, arbitration issues and the regulatory requirements for investment advisers.

Noteworthy: Paul Singer of the hedge fund Elliott Management backs conservative causes and has raised money for Portman. Kohlberg, Kravis and Roberts (KKR) lobbies on taxes, treatment of partnerships and other wealth-building issues; its leaders include GOP stalwarts Henry Kravis and Ken Mehlman, both Portman contributors.

Portman's position: Portman says Wall Street reform was poorly conceived and could hurt small businesses trying to get credit. He favors extending all Bush-era tax cuts.

2. LAWYERS AND LAW FIRMS: \$704,926

Top donor employers/groups: Squire, Sanders & Dempsey (\$94,500), Thompson Hine (\$35,575), Sullivan and Cromwell (\$33,300), Baker & Hostetler (\$32,200), Jones Day (\$30,500).

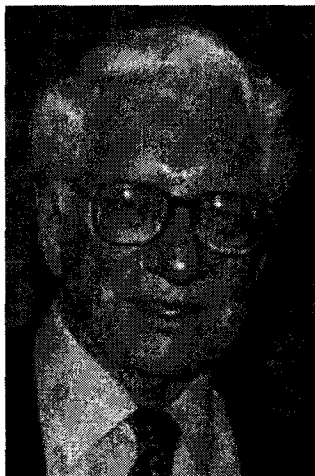
What they want: Politics, friendships and interest-group lobbying merge when it comes to Portman and law firms. After stints in Congress and as President George W. Bush's trade ambassador and budget director, Portman, an attorney, worked for Squire, Sanders & Dempsey, earning \$800,000 in 2008 and amassing new friends and fans. David Goodman, managing partner of the Cleveland office (and a Fisher donor), says the attorneys donate for their own reasons and not for some firm-wide goal. Sixty-four Squire Sanders attorneys had donated to Portman by June 30.

Noteworthy: Sullivan & Cromwell is described by the liberal Campaign for America's Future as "arguably the most powerful firm on Wall Street." Squire Sanders, while primarily a law firm, also lobbies for clients like Limited Brands and the United States Association of Importers of Textiles and Apparel, who pay for advice on trade. If elected, Portman would be the most experienced pro-trade voice in the Senate.

Portman's position: Portman says that trade barriers hurt American economic interests. He would have voted against the financial reforms passed this year.

3. INSURANCE: \$479,284

Top donor employers/groups: American Financial Group (\$101,402), Metlife (\$32,500), Nationwide (\$26,350), Midland Co. (\$25,900), Ohio National Life Insurance (\$24,400).



AP file

[View full size](#)

Carl Lindner

What they want: The big money comes from American Financial, the umbrella under which billionaire financier Carl Lindner Jr. and his family operate. Lindner backs conservative social and economic causes. He also has backed Portman for the candidate's entire political career. As a Cincinnati attorney years ago, Portman represented Chiquita Brands International, then a Lindner company.

Noteworthy: Metlife and Nationwide spend millions monitoring health- and life-insurance legislation, climate-change proposals and financial-reform legislation. The industry favors Republicans (although Metlife has given more heavily to Democrats this season) and Portman is far and away the industry's most heavily favored candidate this year.

Portman's position: Aside from the health insurance overhaul, insurance issues have barely registered in the campaign. The climate for investment has, however, and Portman favors a business-friendly platform with what he calls smart regulation.

4. MANUFACTURING AND DISTRIBUTING: \$438,158

Top donor employers/groups: Procter & Gamble (\$53,150), General Electric (\$41,410), Cintas Corp. (\$25,100), Timken Co. (\$19,500), Eaton Corp. (\$19,300).

What they want: These companies could be hit with higher taxes if Democrats succeed in taxing revenues that multi-national corporations earn overseas. Large defense budgets have helped Canton-based Timken

and the Cincinnati-area jet engine operation of General Electric. All of these companies counts on trade agreements to sell in foreign markets, supporting policies that Portman pushed as Bush's trade adviser.

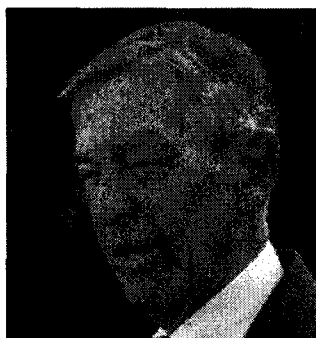
Noteworthy: Cintas Corp. founder Richard Farmer is a major GOP fund-raiser whose company tangled with federal occupational safety authorities before reaching a \$2.76 million settlement in 2008. Cintas retains lobbyists who monitor Democratic efforts to stiffen workplace safety penalties, or as the Cintas PAC website says, to have more inspections and more (and bigger) fines.

Portman's position: The government should create a climate for businesses to grow, Portman says, rather than enact rules that hamper the economy.

5. LEADERSHIP PACS: \$309,700

Top donor employers/groups: 21st Century Majority Fund, Alamo PAC, Bluegrass Committee, Country First PAC, Defend America PAC (each giving \$10,000).

What they want: Political action committees formed on behalf of politicians are able to attract cash and dole it out like an election-season Santa. Their goal: to elect like-minded candidates. Those listed here are affiliated with Sens. Johnny Isakson of Georgia; John Cornyn of Texas; Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky; John McCain of Arizona and Richard Shelby of Alabama.



[View full size](#)

AP file

Sen. George Voinovich

Noteworthy: Leadership PACs can give up to \$10,000, and 20 of them have done so for Portman, including one affiliated with Sen. George Voinovich, called the "Ohio USA PAC." Counting smaller donations, Portman has received money from 49 leadership PACs.

Portman's position: He agrees: he wants to elect Republicans. Portman has his own leadership PAC that gives money to others in his party.

6. REAL ESTATE: \$308,750

Top donor employers/groups: North American Properties (\$25,000), Towne Properties (\$12,500), Corporex Cos. (\$12,350), Fath Properties (\$9,600), RG Properties (\$9,600).

What they want: These closely held companies build apartments, condos, shopping centers and office parks, and their executives could face tax, regulatory and infrastructure obstacles or relief, depending on which party controls Washington. But their contributions are more deeply tied to their Ohio roots: These are Cincinnati companies cheering for the home team, and most involve just a few executives giving a few thousand dollars apiece.

Noteworthy: Towne Properties was founded by the Bortz family, which has played in Cincinnati politics for years. Chris Bortz, a Towne employee and Portman donor, is a current city councilman. His father, Towne CEO Neil Bortz, is also supporting GOP House candidate Steve Chabot and Republican leader John Boehner, who's from a Cincinnati suburb.

Portman's position: He wants what they want, including Chabot's return to Congress and Boehner's reelection.

7. LOBBYISTS: \$249,599

Top donor employers/groups: WPP Group (\$33,700), Strategic Public Partners (\$14,399), Blank Rome (\$11,300), Fierce, Isakowitz & Blalock (\$10,700), BGR Group (\$9,700).

What they want: WPP Group is a conglomerate of public affairs and communications firms whose lobbying subsidiaries -- including Prime Policy Group and Ogilvy Public Affairs -- represent AT&T, the American Petroleum Institute, Boeing, Verizon, Chevron, Motorola and Pfizer. Reading the WPP client list is like reading the Fortune 500 roster.

Noteworthy: The second-largest donor in the lobbyists' class is composed of personnel from the Ohio firm of Strategic Public Partners, which lobbies in Washington and Ohio. Until he announced a sale last week to his partners, the firm was headed by Tom Whatman, a former Ohio Republican Party executive director who recently helped win the campaign to bring casinos to Ohio.

Portman's position: Portman has a pro-private sector record that's in sync with the goals of big businesses and their lobbyists. His campaign spokeswoman says that while he raises money from lobbyists, he also has raised it from more than 18,000 individuals.

OTHER SECTORS: The oil and gas industry closely follows the lobbying industry in financial support for Portman, giving him \$220,458. Donors include top executives of Texas-based Marathon Oil (\$21,800) and Kansas-based Koch Industries (\$17,200), a privately held oil and manufacturing concern. Brothers Charles

and David Koch have bankrolled opposition campaigns against President Barack Obama's agenda on the environment, healthcare and the economy, according to the New Yorker. Koch money for Portman came from each of the brothers, David's wife, Julia, and their company PAC.



[View full size](#)

Lee Fisher arrives at the neighborhood home of Joe and Rhonda Weithman in Clintonville on August 18, 2010. (Eric Albrecht/Columbus Dispatch)

LEE FISHER

1. LAWYERS AND LAW FIRMS: \$712,659

Top donor employers/groups: Squire, Sanders & Dempsey (\$34,100), Jones Day (\$32,600), Murray & Murray (\$29,895), Thompson Hine (\$26,300) and Graham & Graham (\$24,000).

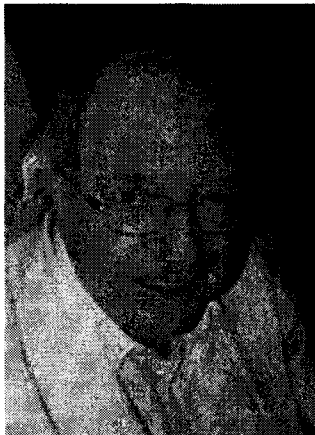
What they want: Attorneys like Fisher, especially plaintiff trial lawyers. But when it comes to his biggest legal source so far, most of the Squire Sanders money came in early 2009, eons ago in the life of a campaign. Only four Squire Sanders donors gave the maximum allowed, \$4,800. This was mostly a case of friendships and former working relationships for Fisher, who served as Ohio attorney general; Fisher's opponent did three times as well getting Squire Sanders contributions.

Noteworthy: The American Association for Justice, otherwise known as the trial lawyers' lobby, gave Fisher \$10,000 through its political action committee on June 25. Fisher also attended a fund-raising event at the trial lawyers' convention, held in Canada in July, but those donations will not be publicly disclosed until Fisher's next Federal Election Commission filing.

Fisher's position: While Fisher says that lawyers who file frivolous lawsuits should be sanctioned, he supports the trial lawyers' position of keeping courts open to victims of wrongdoing without capping damages.

2. REAL ESTATE: \$274,515

Top donor employers/groups: Forest City Enterprises (\$13,000), Cafaro Co. (\$12,600), Goldberg Companies (\$11,500), Rudin Management (\$10,000), Safeguard Properties (\$9,600).



PD file

[View full size](#)

Albert Ratner

What they want: Do they like him because he's a local? Or is their motivation political? With the exception of New York-based Rudin, local *is* political when it comes to the real estate industry. Forest City's top executives such as Albert Ratner are players in Cleveland's real estate and political scenes, enjoying access to decision-makers while owning major properties. But Forest City retains lobbyists in Washington, too, because decisions by Congress on transportation, stimulus and other spending bills potentially benefit company projects in several U.S. cities.

Noteworthy: Principals of the Cafaro Co. have mixed business and politics in the Mahoning Valley for a long time. But retired president Anthony Cafaro Sr., who donated \$4,800 to Fisher in 2009, was indicted in late July in an alleged corruption scheme. So was his sister, Flora Cafaro, who gave \$1,500 to Fisher's campaign on June 23 this year. Anthony Cafaro has called the charges "meritless."

Fisher's position: Fisher, the former development director in Ohio, is pro-development. He has returned the Cafaro money, his campaign says.

3. SECURITIES, INVESTMENT and FINANCE: \$186,198

Top donor employers/groups: Western Investment (\$9,600), RS Capital (\$9,600), Morgan Stanley (\$8,700), Bain Capital (\$7,200), Riverside Co. (\$5,400).

What they want: Wall Street really doesn't want to elect Fisher, despite the six-figure sum the investment industry has provided. The securities and investment industry has donated five times as much to Fisher's opponent, in fact. Wall Street factors in here only because financially secure people give money -- even to Democrats.

Noteworthy: Donors come in all stripes -- and in small groups, in the case of this industry's commitment to Fisher. Western's contributions consisted of money from just three donors from the firm (Western's managing member, Arthur Lipson of Salt Lake City, is a big Democratic donor), as did Riverside's. RS Capital's contributions came from two donors altogether, Stewart and Donna Kohl of Shaker Heights. As for the powerhouses Morgan Stanley and Bain, the Fisher money in each case came from a single employee and a spouse.

Fisher's position: Fisher is for strict financial regulation and a return to old tax rates for top earners.

4. LEADERSHIP PACs: \$173,500

Top donor employers/groups: America Works, America's Leadership PAC, Forward Together PAC, DANPAC, New Millennium PAC (\$10,000 each).



PD file photo

[View full size](#)

Sen. Sherrod Brown

What they want: These PACs, operating at the direction of Democrats in office, want to elect more Democrats and retain a Senate majority. Those listed here are controlled by Sens. Sherrod Brown of Ohio; Debbie Stabenow of Michigan; Mark Warner of Virginia; Daniel Inouye of Hawaii, and Robert Menendez of New Jersey, who chairs the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee

Noteworthy: Leadership PACs can donate up to \$10,000 (\$5,000 for the primary campaign and \$5,000 for the general election). In addition to the five above, others giving the maximum for Fisher include the PACs of Sens. Richard Durbin of Illinois and Harry Reid of Nevada, the Senate majority leader.

Fisher's position: He agrees. He wants to be elected.

5. DEMOCRATIC/LIBERAL: \$146,163

Top donor employers/groups: Act Blue (\$111,365), A.T. Kearney Inc. (\$4,800), Lucky Star Partners (\$4,448), Peter L. Bittenweiser & Associates (\$2,900), Arts Pac (\$2,400).

What they want: Given the small amounts of most of these donations, the only one that matters is Act Blue -- although Peter Bittenweiser, an heir to the Lehman Bros. fortune, has been a major Democratic donor in other years. Act Blue actually is just a facilitator, collecting smaller donations and guiding them to Democratic campaigns across the country through its website, actblue.com, a "clearinghouse for Democratic action."

Noteworthy: Unlike reports filed with the FEC, Act Blue updates its totals daily as donations are made. As of late Thursday, 701 people had given to Fisher through this online service, for an average of \$159 per donation.

Fisher's position: He's for it.

6. PRO-ISRAEL: \$133,375

Top donor employers/groups: Forest City Enterprises (\$22,600), Heartland PAC (\$10,000), Mallard Investments (\$9,600), Gross Builders (\$9,600), Northern Californians for Good Government (\$5,000).

What they want: Donors in this category have a strong history of support for Israel and Jewish community causes. While other donations from Forest City executives and spouses have been attributed to the real estate industry, they are separate from those here and have not been counted twice. This sorting comes from the Center for Responsive Politics, which distinguishes patterns of donations and allocates them to sectors based on the individuals' current and prior contributions.

Noteworthy: Northern Californians for Good Government sounds like a San Francisco Bay-area civic watchdog, but it is actually a group that supports pro-Israel positions and politicians. Heartland PAC, based in Cleveland, appears to have a similar mission, although its treasurer would not discuss it when asked.

Fisher's position: Fisher says he supports "the security of Israel" as well as a two-state solution, saying it could "create a lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians."

7. BUSINESS SERVICES, \$128,618

Top donor employers/groups: Milenthal Group (\$14,200), Multi-Care Management (\$9,600), Towards Employment (\$9,600), Dewey Square Group (\$8,069), Melamed Communications (\$7,699)

What they want: Most of the top donors here represent people who work in and around the infrastructure of Democratic politics. Milenthal Group is headed by David Milenthal, a Columbus ad man with close ties to Gov. Ted Strickland's administration. Dewey Square Group is a Boston-based lobbying and public affairs firm whose founders (and Fisher donors) worked for such names as Carter, Kerry, Gore, Dukakis and Ted Kennedy. Melamed is Alan Melamed's communications firm, synonymous with political campaigns (Cleveland Mayor Frank Jackson, State Rep. Armond Budish) and Ohio voter issues.

Noteworthy: Multi-Care Management, a nursing home company headed by Mort Weisberg, stands out as a non-political exception, although in this cycle Weisburg has also given \$5,000 to Sen. Sherrod Brown's PAC and \$5,000 to the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee. Similarly, Towards Employment is a Cleveland agency that builds job skills. Its donations to Fisher came solely from the agency's director of legal services, Mark Gallagher, and his wife, Kristin.

Fisher's position: He agrees with the goals of these donors: They want Democrats.

OTHER SECTORS: Fisher's other big sectors include Education (\$75,550, with Oberlin College faculty providing \$8,400 of that), Health Professionals (\$67,593, with the American Dental Association giving the biggest single sum, \$2,500), manufacturing, banking and retail sales. But none of these approaches the six-figure level.

HOW THIS STORY WAS REPORTED: The Center for Responsive Politics sorted electronic campaign finance filings for The Plain Dealer, categorizing the top sectors and the top five companies or interests within each sector. The Plain Dealer then conducted interviews and examined data from the Federal Election Commission, Act Blue, and a subscription database called CQ MoneyLine to build files examining individual donations from PACs, employees and spouses within each sector. The Plain Dealer also examined U.S. Senate lobbying reports and company and PAC websites.

© 2010 cleveland.com. All rights reserved.