

# Public Sector Union 2020 Election Spending

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- **Public sector union political action committees (PAC) spent \$16.7 million in Pennsylvania during the 2019–2020 election cycle, principally on behalf of Democratic politicians.**
  - Nearly 91% of the \$5.6 million spent on active races went to Democrats across local, state, and federal office.
  - The majority of donations—\$4.9 million—went to state legislators, with Democrats receiving 90% of donations. An additional \$1.4 million was given to Democratic Party committees to help elect candidates.
  - Over \$1 million was given to politicians not on the 2020 ballot, including \$95,000 to Governor Tom Wolf—bringing his total to \$10.2 million since 2014.
- **Public sector union PACs increasingly channel their political activities through donations to SuperPACs and ideological nonprofits.**
  - They gave approximately \$10 million to other PACs, SuperPACs, and organizations known for running legislative attack ads and funding Wolf’s reelection campaign.
  - For example, public sector union PACs gave \$625,000 million to PA Alliance Action, a nonprofit bankrolling the SuperPAC Pennsylvania Fund for Change to flip the legislature.
- **Public sector union officials continue to spend workers’ dues on electioneering, with minimal transparency.**
  - Fund for Change received \$875,000 in dues and SuperPAC money *directly* from AFSCME and NEA Advocacy Fund, and \$1 million in union dues went to PA Alliance Action.
  - Similarly, national unions NEA, SEIU, AFSCME, and AFT—which receive funds from state and local unions in Pennsylvania—gave \$8.3 million in dues in 2019–2020 to the obscure, left-leaning Arabella network.
  - Since 2007, Pennsylvania’s largest public sector unions have spent over \$151 million on politics when factoring in dues spent on “political activities and lobbying.”

## FUNDING POLITICAL CANDIDATES

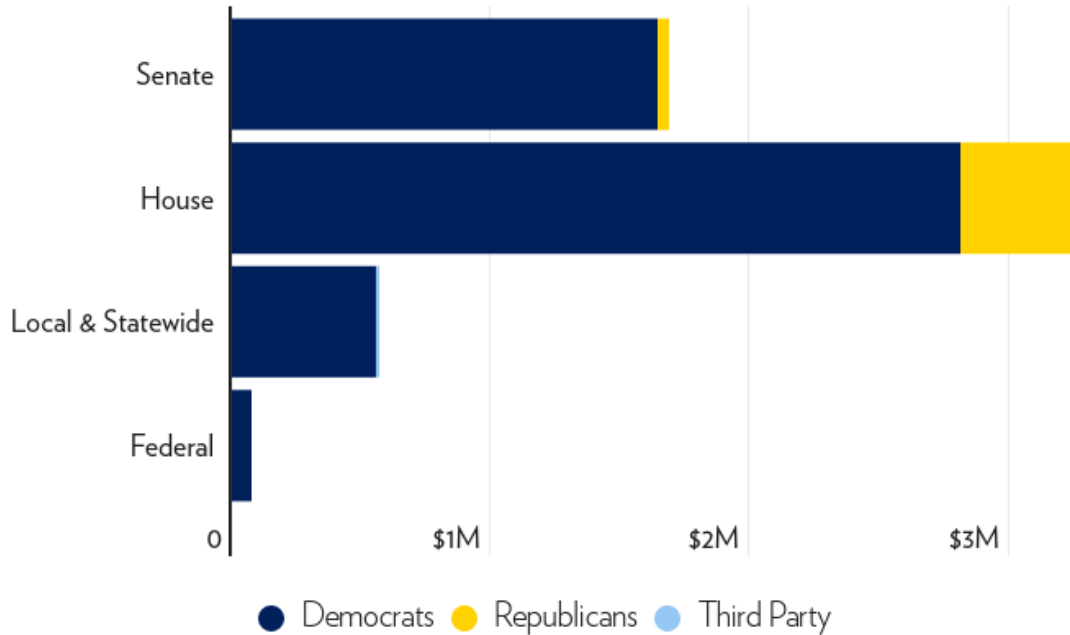
In the 2020 election cycle, public sector unions representing state, municipal, education, public safety, and health care workers across the state proved once again their political and partisan strength. Their political action committees, which are bankrolled through transfers from dues-funded accounts or direct contributions from members, spent \$16.7 million.<sup>1</sup>

### ■ Historical Giving

- During the 2017–2018 midterm elections, the largest Pennsylvania public sector union PACs spent over \$12 million. While legislative candidates on the ballot received \$2.8 million, Governor Tom Wolf alone received over double that amount, accounting for 19% of his donations.
- During the 2016 cycle, government unions outspent other industries and in 2015 were instrumental in electing Democratic state Supreme Court judges, who have subsequently sparred with the legislature over drawing legislative districts and elections procedures.<sup>2</sup>
- This trend repeated itself in 2020, with public sector union PACs spending nearly 91% of their \$5.6 million to elect Democratic candidates. However, a larger share of that total is going to outside political organizations or independent expenditures on behalf of candidates, shrouding the union influence.

# Public Sector Union PAC Donations to Political Candidates, 2019–2020

*\$5.6 million went to candidates on the ballot, 91% of which were Democrats.*



Source: Pennsylvania Department of State, Campaign Finance Database. Active races only.

## ■ 2020 Pennsylvania Legislative Races

- Public sector union PAC spending was concentrated primarily in the legislature. They donated to 266 legislative candidates and elected officials, 225 of whom were running for office. Nearly 88% of gifts in active races went to House (\$3.3) and Senate (\$1.7) candidates.
- Of those running for office, 18 candidates in the Senate and 121 in the House were Democrats and received nearly 90% of donations.
- In contrast, just 72 House and 14 Senate Republican candidates received union PAC donations, 28 of whom faced no opponent and all but six of whom were incumbents.<sup>3</sup>
- In 29 legislative races, government unions donated to both party candidates vying for a seat.

## TOP 10 LEGISLATIVE RECIPIENTS OF GOVERNMENT UNION PAC DONATIONS 2020 ELECTION

	Sen. Pam Iovino	\$395,250
	George Scott	\$219,050
	Sen. Vincent Hughes	\$210,500
	Janet Diaz	\$202,500
	Veronica Green	\$180,671
	Rep. Matt Bradford	\$172,000
	Rep. Frank Dermody	\$161,000
	Julie Slomski	\$160,500
	Tom Mehaffie	\$152,900
	Sen. Jay Costa	\$120,250

Source: PA Department of State, Campaign Finance Database. Donations come from the 14 largest state unions and AFT, AFSCME, NEA, and SEIU.

### ■ Pennsylvania Local and Statewide Offices

- Over \$1.2 million went to candidates across the state, from row officers to county and city officials to judges. Of that, over \$569,250 went to identifiable active races, and 97.7% of recipients were Democrats.
- Statewide row offices were by far the largest bulk of this spending at just over \$550,000, all but \$750 of which went to Democrats Nina Ahmad, Josh Shapiro, and Joe Torsella.
- The Pennsylvania Democratic Attorneys General Association gave an additional \$200,000 to Shapiro.

- Notably, Wolf received \$95,000 from the Pennsylvania State Education Association (PSEA), a higher education union, and state liquor store union UFCW 1776, bringing his total to \$10.3 million since 2014. Though not running for office, his PAC supports Democratic candidates down ballot, spending \$5.5 million in 2019–2020.
- Judicial candidates, from municipal judges to Superior Court Judge Daniel McCaffery, also received over \$44,000. Most of these races, however, were for the 2019 municipal elections.

## Public Sector Union PAC Donations to Statewide Row Offices

2019–2020

Auditor General	
Nina Ahmad (D)	\$129,000
Tim DeFoor (R)	\$250
Attorney General	
Josh Shapiro* (D)	\$349,500
Heather Heidelbaugh (R)	\$0
Treasurer	
Joe Torsella* (D)	\$72,500
Stacy Garrity (R)	\$500

Source: Pennsylvania Department of State, Campaign Finance Database.

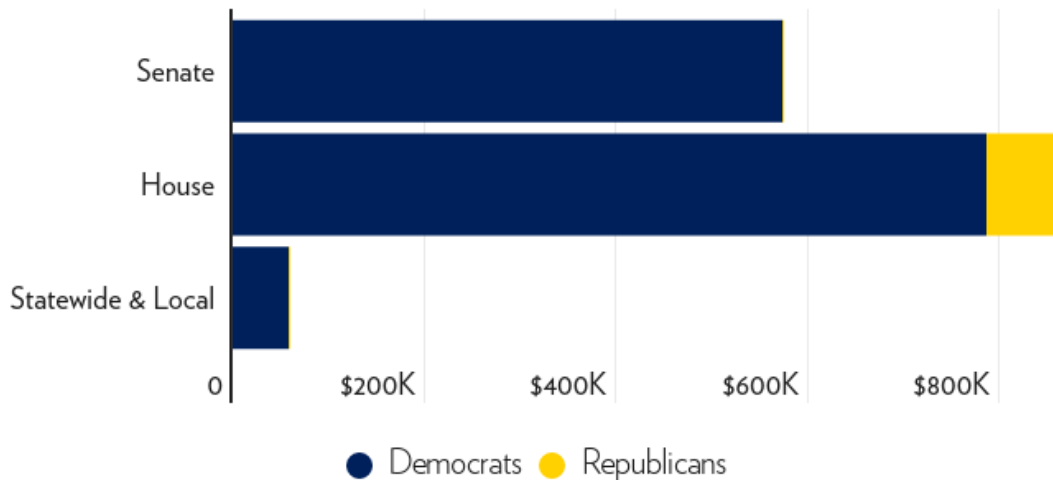
\*Incumbent

### ■ Funding Party Committees

- Public sector unions also funded Democratic and Republican Party committees across the state to the tune of \$1.5 million. These committees in turn donated to candidates or ran advertisements on their behalf.
- The vast majority went to Democratic parties: \$786,750 to the House Democratic Campaign Committee, \$572,500 to the Senate Democratic Campaign Committee, and smaller donations to 32 county city committees.
- In contrast, Republican committees received just \$83,549, the majority of which went to House committees.

# Public Sector Union PAC Donations to Political Party Committees, 2019–2020

*\$1.5 million went to Pa. political party committees, 94% Democratic.*



Source: Pennsylvania Department of State, Campaign Finance Database. Active races only.

## ■ Presidential Election

- President Joe Biden received just \$90,000 directly from public sector union PACs. Most union funding has shifted to SuperPACs, independent expenditures, or to politically and ideologically motivated nonprofits. For instance, as of November 11, 2020, the Center for Responsive Politics accounted for over \$18 million in independent expenditures spent on behalf of Biden from the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), American Federation of Teachers (AFT), National Education Association (NEA), and International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF).<sup>4</sup>
- [As an illustration](#), reports just prior to the election found NEA raised \$23 million through its PAC, nearly all of which it passed on to its own SuperPAC, the NEA Advocacy Fund, which then spent \$25 million supporting almost exclusively Democratic candidates and committees.<sup>5</sup>

## PUBLIC SECTOR UNION GIVING TO THE PROGRESSIVE NETWORK

Public Sector union political influence is often shrouded in an exchange of money between unions, PACs, Independent Expenditures Committees (IECs, also known as SuperPACs), opaque “projects,” and ideological advocacy groups. This includes money from union PACs—approximately \$10 million in the 2020

election cycle—and union dues, meaning members are bankrolling a political network that helps elect (or attack) candidates through mailers, sponsorships, ads, and get-out-the-vote efforts. Many workers remain unaware their dues fund such activities.

### ■ Contributions to Ideological Organizations and SuperPACs

- **SEIU Caregivers Action.** SEIU Healthcare PA seeded \$230,000 in dues to establish the SuperPAC SEIU Caregivers Action, which spent \$132,280, principally in support of Democrats.
- **Pennsylvania Fund for Change.** A SuperPAC formed by trial lawyers, the Fund for Change directly received \$875,000 from AFSCME and the NEA Advocacy Fund, \$125,000 from the [Committee for a Better Tomorrow](#) (Philadelphia trial lawyers), and \$200,000 from the Sixteen Thirty Fund (discussed below). The Fund then spent over \$7 million in 2020—of which \$775,000 was specifically earmarked to run ads and mailers supporting Democrats.<sup>6</sup>
- **PA Alliance Action.** A 501(c)4 called PA Alliance Action received \$625,000 in 2020 from union PACs (\$1.05 since 2016), plus \$1 million from union members' dues (\$1.05 million since 2018).<sup>7</sup>
  - While PA Alliance Action acts largely behind the scenes, they provide significant funding to Pennsylvania Fund for Change: \$1.5 million in 2018, which it used to [attack](#) Republican lawmakers, and an additional \$4 million in 2020.
- **Fairness PA.** Public sector union PACs funneled \$195,000 to Fairness PA, which gave exclusively (\$896,800) to Democratic candidates.
  - This PAC featured [prominently](#) in the 2018 election, when it received \$345,000 from public sector unions. Formed by trial lawyers who owned pharmacies and opposed workers compensation reform that Wolf subsequently vetoed, Fairness PA was one of Wolf's largest donors in that election at \$1.6 million.
- **Commonwealth Communications.** Public sector unions gave \$100,000 to Commonwealth Communications, a progressive SuperPAC run by Wolf's former press secretary.
  - Commonwealth Communications spent over \$830,000 in independent expenditures on behalf of Democratic Pennsylvania federal candidates and Joe Biden, as well as \$270,000 [running ads](#) for Pennsylvania Democratic candidates through the projects Vote.PA and We Go Together.
  - Commonwealth Communications gave \$25,000 to the SuperPAC Conservation Voters of PA Victory Fund, which funnels money to its 501(c)4, the Conservation Voters of PA. The latter launched a “massive statewide campaign” of nearly \$1 million in the final months of the election to flip the Pennsylvania General Assembly to a “pro-environmental majority.”
- Two public sector union PAC-funded organizations with minimal public information include:
  - **The Voter Project**, which received \$550,000 for voter mobilization and sent out [voting mailers](#) and is reportedly financially sponsored by the Keystone Research Center, a left-leaning think tank in Pennsylvania funded by unions and The New Venture Fund (discussed below).<sup>8</sup>

- **Project Keystone**, a Philadelphia 501(c)4 receiving over \$316,025 in 2019–2020 to inform Pennsylvania organizations legislative information. It received an additional \$162,750 in union dues.<sup>9</sup>
- **Pennsylvania Stands Up**. Unions donated \$50,000 to [Pennsylvania Stands Up](#), an independent political organization that made 4.5 million voter contacts with the purpose of “flipping the state legislature.” This includes an October 2020 ad in Dauphin, Lehigh, Berks, Chester, Montgomery, Lackawanna, and Luzerne counties for their [endorsed Democratic candidates](#).<sup>10</sup>

#### ■ **Cog in the Arabella Advisors Network**<sup>11</sup>

- Arabella Advisors is a for-profit based in Washington, D.C., operating as a conduit of money for left-of-center organizations through four managed nonprofits: the New Venture Fund, Sixteen Thirty Fund (the single 501(c)4), Hopewell Fund, and the Windward Fund. These funds’ collective revenue surpasses \$600 million and funds various other nonprofits, committees, and projects such as America Votes, League of Conservation Voters, and even the Pennsylvania Fund for Change.
- While difficult to track funding through the Arabella network, considering many of the nonprofits do not disclose donors, records show union funding throughout the network. National unions NEA, SEIU, AFSCME, and AFT—which receive funds from state and local unions in Pennsylvania—have given nearly \$10 million to two of Arabella’s main nonprofits.
  - Since 2013, the New Venture Fund received nearly \$2 million, including \$190,000 in the 2019–2020 cycle.
  - Since 2012, at least \$7.9 million went to the Sixteen Thirty Fund, nearly \$500,000 in the 2019–2020 cycle.
- At least \$15.4 million in public sector union dues went directly to the organizations funded by Arabella, such as Priorities USA, Senate Majority PAC, and NextGen Climate Action. This includes \$7.5 million in the 2019–2020 election cycle.
  - The NEA Advocacy Fund, a Super PAC, gave an additional \$3 million to these funds, principally the House and Senate Majority PAC to elect Democrats.

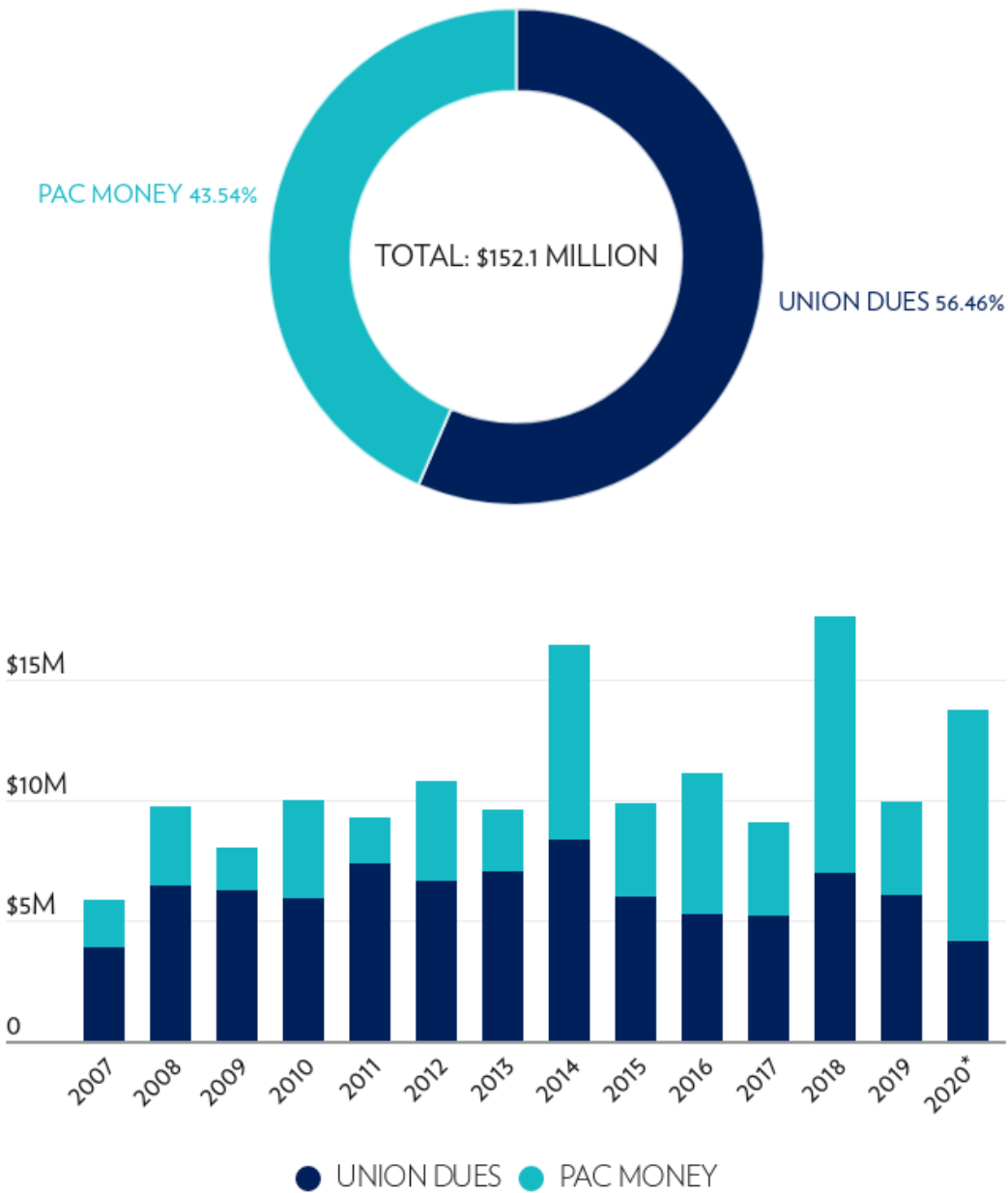
#### ■ **Total Public Sector Union Political Spending**

- Considering the interconnectedness between progressive organizations and union PACs, SuperPACs, and dues, total political spending by Pennsylvania public sector unions provides a more accurate snapshot of union politicization and influence.
- Since 2007, the largest public sector unions in Pennsylvania have spent over \$151 million on politics. This includes dues-funded “political activities and lobbying” and PAC donations. This total is an underrepresentation by both, excluding unions that do not file annual financial reports to the Department of Labor and not including political donations alternatively labeled as “contributions, gifts, and grants.”<sup>12</sup>



# Pa. Public Sector Union Political Spending

2007–2020



Sources: The U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Labor-Management Standards, Pa. Department of State, Campaign Finance Database.

\*Most 2020 dues spending not available.

## CONCLUSION

As analyses of the 2020 and previous election cycles reveal, government unions continue to have an outsized influence on politics both nationally and in Pennsylvania. While direct giving remains a strong form of political influence, shifting of money—including dues money taken from members with no union representation alternatives—between funds is increasingly becoming the norm. Looser reporting requirements and spending on behalf of candidates through vendors or other organizations obscure the true extent of union influence and extreme partisanship. This practice also underscores government unions' place among a socially and politically progressive network.

While political involvement has long been the prerogative of unions and workers may share the political perspective of their leaders, the lack of true transparency should trouble members who do not share their union leaders' political perspectives or prefer dues to remain focused on collective bargaining. All Pennsylvanians should have cause for concern as union leaders negotiate taxpayer-funded contracts with politicians they help elect across all three branches of government. The potential for corruption, the incentive for larger and less accountable government, and the distilled mission of unions should be addressed by Pennsylvania elected officials to remove unaccountable politics from governance across every branch of government.

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<sup>1</sup> "Campaign Finance Reports," Pennsylvania Department of State, <https://www.campaignfinanceonline.pa.gov/Pages/CampaignFinanceHome.aspx>. Data includes reports submitted by the follow unions as of December 2020: AFSCME 13, AFT PA, APSCUF, FOP, PA AFL-CIO, Pittsburgh, and Philadelphia Federation of Teachers, PFFFA, PSCOA, PSEA, SEIU (state council, Local 668, Healthcare PA), PFT, UFCW 1776, and Pennsylvania-specific expenditures from AFSCME PEOPLE, AFT COPE, NEA Fund for Children & Public Education, and SEIU D.C.

<sup>2</sup> Jessica Barnett, "Government Union 2018 Election Spending," Commonwealth Foundation (February 13, 2019), <https://www.commonwealthfoundation.org/policyblog/detail/government-union-2018-election-spending>; Jessica Barnett, "Policy Memo: Government Union Political Spending Trends," Commonwealth Foundation (April, 19, 2017), <https://www.commonwealthfoundation.org/policyblog/detail/policy-memo-government-union-political-spending-trends>; Bill Morris, "Pennsylvania Unions Flood Judicial Races with Millions," Washington Free Beacon (October 28, 2015), <https://freebeacon.com/issues/pennsylvania-unions-flood-judicial-races-with-millions/>.

<sup>3</sup> Just 86 of the 117 Democrats were incumbents.

<sup>4</sup> "Independent Expenditures, Joe Biden, 2020 Cycle," Center for Responsive Politics, <https://www.opensecrets.org/2020-presidential-race/joe-biden/candidate-outside-spending?id=N00001669>.

<sup>5</sup> Mike Antonucci, "Analysis, How Much NEA and AFT are Spending on the 2020 Campaign, and Where They are Spending It," The74 (October 21, 2020), <https://www.the74million.org/article/analysis-how-much-nea-and-aft-are-spending-on-the-2020-campaign-and-where-they-are-spending-it/>.

<sup>6</sup> The Pennsylvania Fund for Change also reported to the Federal Election Commission spending over \$1 million in ads attacking Donald Trump. Much of the Fund's spending remains unaccounted for.

<sup>7</sup> PA Alliance Action received \$800,000 from the NEA in 2020, \$50,000 from the PSEA in 2019–2020, and \$150,000 in 2019 from the SEIU in dues-funded contributions.

<sup>8</sup> Kiley Koscinski, "Postcards on Voting Cause Confusion Among Some Pennsylvanians," 90.5 WESA (October 13, 2020), <https://www.wesa.fm/post/postcards-voting-cause-confusion-among-some-pennsylvanians#stream/0>.

<sup>9</sup> "2018 IRS Form 990," Guidestar, [https://pdf.guidestar.org/PDF/Images/2018/823/945/2018-823945874-10ff0c02-90.pdf?\\_gl=1\\*ei3w41\\*\\_ga\\*MTA3NDE2ODY3MS4xNjExNjg4Mzc3\\*\\_ga\\_0H865XH5JK\\*MTYxMTY4ODM4Mi4xLjEuMTYxMTY4ODUyOS4w\\*\\_ga\\_5W8PXYYGBX\\*MTYxMTY4ODM4Mi4xLjEuMTYxMTY4ODUyOS4w\\*\\_ga=2.150172726.1277301184.1611688377-1074168671.1611688377](https://pdf.guidestar.org/PDF/Images/2018/823/945/2018-823945874-10ff0c02-90.pdf?_gl=1*ei3w41*_ga*MTA3NDE2ODY3MS4xNjExNjg4Mzc3*_ga_0H865XH5JK*MTYxMTY4ODM4Mi4xLjEuMTYxMTY4ODUyOS4w*_ga_5W8PXYYGBX*MTYxMTY4ODM4Mi4xLjEuMTYxMTY4ODUyOS4w*_ga=2.150172726.1277301184.1611688377-1074168671.1611688377).

<sup>10</sup> "As 2020 Election Draws Near, PA Stands Up Announces Endorsements, Plan to Build on Primary Wins," PA Stands Up (September 2, 2020), <https://pastandup.org/news/as-2020-election-draws-near-pa-stands-up-announces-endorsements-plan-to-build-on-primary-wins/>.

<sup>11</sup> Hayden Ludwig, "The Shadow Over America," Capital Research Center (September 10, 2020), [https://capitalresearch.org/app/uploads/CRC\\_TheShadowOverAmerica-09-10-2020\\_FINAL.pdf](https://capitalresearch.org/app/uploads/CRC_TheShadowOverAmerica-09-10-2020_FINAL.pdf); Scott Bland, "Liberal Dark-money Behemoth Raised Nearly \$140M Last Year," Politico (November 20, 2020), <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/11/20/liberal-dark-money-fundraising-438667>. Arabella Advisors research comes principally from the Internal Revenue Service Form 990, the Federal Election Commission campaign finance reports, and the U.S. Department of Labor Form LM-2.

<sup>12</sup> "Campaign Finance Reports," Pennsylvania Department of State, <https://www.campaignfinanceonline.pa.gov/Pages/CampaignFinanceHome.aspx>; Office of Labor Management Standards, "Form LM-2," U.S. Department of Labor, <https://olmsapps.dol.gov/query/getOrgQry.do>. Unions include PSEA, the Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers, AFSCME Council 13, SEIU State Council, Local 668, and Healthcare PA, UFCW 1776, PSCOA, APSCUF, FOP State Lodge, PFFF, and state-level expenditures from AFT, AFSCME, and NEA.