



HOW THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SHEET METAL, AIR, RAIL AND TRANSPORTATION WORKERS FUNDS ITS POLITICAL AGENDA

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In an ongoing effort to shed light on how unions allocate their members' dues, the Center for Union Facts analyzed spending data from the the International Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation Workers (SMART) and its local unions between the years of 2019 and 2022. Using annual financial filings with the Department of Labor (known as LM-2 forms), we found that the SMART union and its locals send a significant portion of its members' dues to left-leaning political advocacy, typically without the consent of its membership.

In that time frame alone, the SMART union spent nearly \$80 million on notable entities. We characterized notable entities as payments made by the SMART union for non-representational activities, including political spending, contributions to advocacy groups, and payments to consulting firms.

Our analysis found that SMART union spending is primarily focused on three key areas: support for member branches and SMART union political action committees, consulting efforts, and contributions to left-leaning campaigns and ballot initiatives. Notably, a significant portion of the SMART union budget is allocated toward funding special interests.

SMART union spending is overwhelmingly partisan. Between the years 2019 and 2022, the SMART union sent over \$6 million to left-leaning advocacy, while it only directed \$15,000 toward bipartisan efforts and \$59,636 toward GOP-led initiatives and campaigns.

2019

- Super PACs: \$63,114
- Consultants & Misc.: \$6,080,089
- DNC & Aligned: \$321,357
- Bipartisan Efforts: \$0
- GOP & Aligned: \$0
- Separate Union Funds: \$9,371,608
- Special Interests: \$185,816
- Economic Left: \$383,500
- Civil Rights: \$15,000
- Environmentalists: \$303,300
- Left-Wing Media: \$126,860

Total: \$16,850,644

2020

- Super PACs: \$57,000
- Consultants & Misc.: \$6,581,503
- DNC & Aligned: \$577,445
- Bipartisan Efforts: \$0
- GOP & Aligned: \$0
- Separate Union Funds: \$9,518,702
- Special Interests: \$885,045
- Economic Left: \$348,500
- Civil Rights: \$0
- Environmentalists: \$204,500
- Left-Wing Media: \$126,975

Total: \$18,299,670

2021

- Super PACs: \$35,000
- Consultants & Misc.: \$5,376,184
- DNC & Aligned: \$533,149
- Bipartisan Efforts: \$10,000
- GOP & Aligned: \$0
- Separate Union Funds: \$17,261,448
- Special Interests: \$241,850
- Economic Left: \$361,100
- Civil Rights: \$0
- Environmentalists: \$200,740
- Left-Wing Media: \$139,041

Total: \$24,158,512

2022

- Super PACs: \$100,036
- Consultants & Misc.: \$6,449,324
- DNC & Aligned: \$721,248
- Bipartisan Efforts: \$5,000
- GOP & Aligned: \$59,636
- Separate Union Funds: \$12,145,022
- Special Interests: \$426,910
- Economic Left: \$361,500
- Civil Rights: \$5,500
- Environmentalists: \$175,490
- Left-Wing Media: \$140,285

Total: \$20,589,951

SMART SPENDING TOTALS – 2019-2022

- Super PACs: \$255,150
- Consultants & Misc.: \$24,487,100
- DNC & Aligned: \$2,153,199
- Bipartisan Efforts: \$15,000
- GOP & Aligned: \$59,636
- Separate Union Funds: \$48,296,780
- Special Interests: \$1,739,621
- Economic Left: \$1,454,600
- Civil Rights: \$20,500
- Environmentalists: \$884,030
- Left-Wing Media: \$533,161

Total: \$79,898,777

TOP 20 RECIPIENTS BETWEEN 2019-2022

- \$1,205,000 — Coalition for Responsible Equitable Economic Development (Creed LA)
- \$709,750 — Union Sportsmen’s Alliance
- \$399,000 — California Democratic Party
- \$200,000 — Jobs to Move America
- \$181,750 — Counterpoint Messaging LLC
- \$163,350 — Keep Government Accountable
- \$161,288 — The Labor Tribune
- \$160,000 — Efforts to Stop the Recall of Gavin Newsom (includes “Stop the Republican Recall of Gavin Newsom” and “No on the Recall of Governor Newsom”)
- \$142,100 — Working Families Friends
- \$132,500 — Bay Area Legislative Leaders PAC
- \$132,062 — The Labor Beacon
- \$102,659 — New Labor Press
- \$100,036 — DougPAC
- \$100,000 — BlueGreen Alliance
- \$100,000 — Preserve Middle Class America
- \$100,000 — No on Prop 22
- \$100,000 — Show-Me-Change
- \$100,000 — Committee for Safe, Updated, Modernized Schools
- \$57,446 — Labor News
- \$50,000 — Committee for Affordable Resilient Berkeley (Yes on Measure L)

The top twenty recipients between 2019-2022 included well-known progressive environmentalist groups like the Union Sportsmen’s Alliance and the BlueGreen Alliance. The Union Sportsmen’s Alliance was founded by Democratic union leaders and backs progressive environmental policies while the BlueGreen Alliance primarily endorses Democratic candidates for office.

Other top recipients included left-of-center economic groups like the Coalition for Responsible Equitable Economic Development, as well as several Democratic-oriented organizations and initiatives like the California Democratic Party, Counterpoint Messaging LLC, and efforts to stop the recall of California Gov. Gavin Newsom. Interestingly, several labor-focused media outlets were among the top recipients, including The Labor Beacon, New Labor Press, and Labor News.

POLITICAL ADVOCACY BREAKDOWN BY PARTY

Of the money the SMART union spent on political or issue advocacy between 2019-2022 (DNC & Aligned, Bipartisan Efforts, GOP & Aligned, Economic Left, Civil Rights, Environmentalists, Special Interests, and Left-Wing Media), the vast majority went to issues on the left.



RECIPIENTS ON THE LEFT BETWEEN 2019-2022 INCLUDE

DNC & ALIGNED \$2,153,159

- California Democratic Party
- National Democratic Club
- Bay Area Legislative Leaders PAC
- Democratic Party of New Mexico
- Kansas Democratic Party
- Alameda County Democratic Central Committee
- DougPAC
- Show-Me-Change
- National Democratic Institute
- Counterpoint Messaging LLC
- Friends for Kathy Hochul
- Democratic Party of Illinois

ECONOMIC LEFT \$1,454,600

- Coalition for Responsible Equitable Economic Development (Creed LA)
- Working Families Friends
- Jobs with Justice
- Working Partnerships USA
- The Roosevelt Institute
- For the Future of Working Families 2022

ENVIRONMENTALISTS \$884,030

- Union Sportsmen's Alliance
- BlueGreen Alliance
- Unions for Jobs and Environmental Progress
- California Foundation on the Environment & Economy

SPECIAL INTERESTS \$1,739,621

- Jobs to Move America
- Alliance for Action
- The Peggy Browning Fund
- Preserve Middle Class America
- New Mexico Workers for Progress
- Keep Government Accountable
- Committee for Safe, Updated, Modernized Schools
- Efforts to Stop the Recall of Gavin Newsom
- California Jewish Legislative Caucus
- Committee for Affordable Resilient Berkeley (Yes on Measure L)
- The California Legislative Latino Caucus Foundation
- Better Roads and Transit
- The California Legislative Black Caucus Policy Institute

CIVIL RIGHTS \$20,500

- Urban Affairs Coalition
- Urika Center for Public Policy
- The Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC)

LEFT-WING MEDIA \$533,161

- The Labor Tribune
- The Labor Beacon
- Labor News
- PhillyLabor.com
- Northwest Labor Press
- Beacon Press

METHODOLOGY

This data is based on annual financial reports filed with the Department of Labor (LM-2 reports). The Center for Union Facts analyzed all payments made by all national and local SMART union chapters to an entity (otherwise known as “payees”) for the years 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022. These payments are classified by the union as “Political Activities,” “Representational Activities,” “Contributions, Gifts & Grants,” “Union Administration,” or “General Overhead.”

We then sorted each payment entry into one of eleven groups: Super PACs, Consultants & Misc., DNC & Aligned, Bipartisan Efforts, GOP & Aligned, Separate Union Funds, Special Interests, Economic Left, Civil Rights, Environmentalists, and Left-Wing Media. Certain line items, including overhead costs and other general spending, that did not fit into these defined categories were not included in the final analysis.

Once the data points were sorted, we added up the totals within each group to provide a holistic image of how the International Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation Workers allocates a large share of the dues dollars it receives from its members.

DEFINITIONS

The Super PACs section consists of political action committees that raise money from individuals, corporations, labor unions, and other political action committees for the purpose of financing political activities.

The Consultants & Misc. section has two components. “Consultants” refers to contracted consultants, lobbyists, public relations firms, communications and marketing corporations, legislative consultants, research firms, and publicity-oriented groups. “Misc.” includes promotional items, communications/messaging software, mail and printing, advertising expenses, election services, newspaper subscriptions, and, more broadly, airfare expenses, hotel expenses, and utility expenses.

The DNC & Aligned section consists of payments made toward registered Democrats, Democrat Party-funded initiatives, Democratic campaigns, and organizations that focus on advancing the interest of the Democratic Party.

The Bipartisan Efforts section consists of individuals, coalitions, or initiatives that are truly non-partisan and neither endorse, nor advance the interests of, a political party.

The GOP & Aligned section consists of payments made toward registered Republicans, Republican Party-funded initiatives, Republican campaigns, and organizations that focus on advancing the interest of the Republican Party.

The Separate Union Funds section consists of parent organizations, local branches, labor

federations, joint councils, union-funded political action committees, and affiliated labor organizations. Politically motivated funds are also included in this section, including strike funds, political education funds, and union organizing drive funds.

The Special Interests section consists of payments made toward ballot measures, initiatives, funds, and coalitions that address unique policy matters over a larger party or union agenda.

The Economic Left section consists of organizations that focus on advancing the economy through a progressive lens. Some examples include non-union groups that push for higher wages, workers' rights coalitions, and progressive think-tanks.

The Civil Rights section consists of payments made toward organizations that have race and identity-related agendas. Examples range from larger organizations like the SCLC to smaller groups that focus on urban reform.

The Environmentalists section consists of organizations and initiatives that fund progressive climate and sustainability-centric campaigns. Examples include larger organizations like the Union Sportsmen's Alliance to nonprofits that advocate for certain environmental policies.

The Left-Wing Media section consists of media groups, newspapers, and online outlets that train, support, sponsor, and project the messages of labor unions, activists, progressive policymakers, or Democrat-led initiatives.

Certain overhead payments were not included in the final spending estimate. Some of the more common examples include payments toward rent, cable companies, insurance, office supplies, building maintenance, internet service providers, accountants, lawyers and attorneys, auditors, social outings, and grocery stores.

Non-political charities, funds, and nonprofits were also removed from the final estimate. Such examples include St. Jude's Children's Research Hospital, The Irish Red Cross, disaster relief funds, and museums.