



A rundown of the top Jewish political donors this election cycle

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WASHINGTON — George Soros may draw some of the most vociferous criticism, but he's hardly the biggest political donor in this cash-heavy election cycle — Democrat or Republican.

In fact, Soros is 24th in the largest givers in this cycle, and Jewish donors on both the right and left populate the list above him.

That's according to Open Secrets, which provides the top 100 individuals or married couples donating to the 2020 campaign. Among the top 25 on the list, 15 are Jewish or of Jewish origin.

Democrats far outstrip Republicans as recipients of the largest donations.

The big donors include Tom Steyer, No. 1 on the list, and Donald Sussman, who have joined Soros in the litany of Democratic donors. Miriam and Sheldon Adelson are No. 5 — their money goes exclusively to Republican candidates. Plus there's a host of Jewish donors who have drawn little public attention despite giving in the multimillions.

The Open Secrets rundown is up to date as of Sept. 8. With the final weeks of the campaign seeing an accelerated fundraising push, the rankings may change.

1. Tom Steyer

Amount given so far: \$54 million to Democrats.

Steyer tops the list by far. The hedge funder, who was among the candidates seeking the Democratic presidential nomination, has donated over \$54 million to Democrats — and, intriguingly, \$35 to Republicans.

Lest you think Steyer is leading this cycle because of his own campaign, he has resided in the top three since the 2014 congressional cycle. Most of his money has gone to outside groups backing an array of Democratic candidates. (Steyer has endorsed Joe Biden and is fundraising for him.)

Steyer, whose father was Jewish, is a practicing Episcopalian.

4. Stephen and Christine Schwarzman

Amount given so far: \$28.4 million to Republicans and \$8,400 to Democrats.

Stephen Schwarzman is CEO of Blackstone, an investment management firm, and was one of Trump's council of business advisers until they all shut down after the deadly neo-Nazi march in Charlottesville in 2017. Trump equivocated in condemning the rioters, and businesses came under pressure to cut ties with the administration.

Schwarzman told Reuters he got messages calling him a Nazi.

"It was pretty clear that the country itself felt like it was going out of control," he said at the time. "We decided there was too much pressure for too many people all running public companies."

His first major donation to Israel was in 2018, when he gave the National Library \$10 million.

5. Sheldon and Miriam Adelson

Amount given so far: \$28 million to Republicans.

Sheldon Adelson, 87, is a Las Vegas-based casino magnate and Miriam, 74, is a physician. They are major givers to an array of Jewish and pro-Israel causes, as well as to medical research.

Adelson's endorsement of Trump in May, 2016 opened the floodgates to Jewish donors who until then had been skeptical of the candidate.

Trump reportedly berated Sheldon Adelson in August for not giving enough to the campaign as Biden's fundraising began to outpace the incumbent's. But Adelson ponied up this month and has pledged \$50 million to elect Republicans and send Trump back to the White House.

Adelson may be hedging his bets: He reportedly has paid \$87 million for the residence of the US ambassador in suburban Tel Aviv, possibly as a means of preventing Biden from moving the embassy back to that city (although Biden has said he has no intention of doing so). Trump says his move of the embassy to Jerusalem was one of the highlights of his presidency.

6. Donald Sussman

Amount given so far: \$22.3 million, all to Democrats save for \$5,600 to Republicans.

Sussman, 74, launched his investment career at age 12, in 1958, when he bet that the Cuban revolution would drive up the price of sugar. He's known for his close ties to the Clintons — he was a major backer of Hillary's 2016 presidential campaign.

Sussman said he was dumping money into her campaign because of her pledge to take money out of politics, and he acknowledged the irony.

In his charitable giving, he appears to be particularly proud of his relationship with Israel's Weizmann Institute, listing his position as deputy chairman of its international board of governors and his honorary doctorate from there on his official bio.

Sussman was married to a Maine congresswoman, Chellie Pingree, from 2011 to 2016 and continues to be heavily involved in the state. He has given \$100,000 to groups backing Sara Gideon, who is challenging incumbent Republican Sen. Susan Collins.

Republicans in Maine have endeavored to depict Sussman as an interloper, or in the state's lingo, "from away." In a radio interview, Collins singled out three "from away" Jews, including Sussman, as backing Gideon's campaign.

7. James and Marilyn Simons

Amount given so far: Nearly \$21 million to Democrats.

James Simons has been called one of the smartest Wall Street financiers of all time, thanks to his contributions to string theory and his application of mathematical breakthroughs to investment banking.

Born to a Jewish family in the Boston suburb of Brookline, Simons' net worth is over \$23 billion. He and his wife set up the Simons Foundation, one of the largest charity groups in the US, in 1994.

9. Michael Bloomberg

Amount given so far: \$19.3 million to Democrats.

Bloomberg, who runs an eponymous media empire, was a three-term mayor of New York, elected as a Republican and then as an Independent.

He endorsed Hillary Clinton for president in 2016 and in his speech at the Democratic convention excoriated Trump as a con man, earning the Trump sobriquet "Mini Mike."

Bloomberg, 78, mounted a campaign for the presidency this year and initially polled well — until he was eviscerated in his first debate by a rival, Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass.

Bloomberg said this month that he will spend \$100 million in Florida, a swing state won by Trump in 2016 and critical to his reelection.

He has already donated \$16 million for paying the legal fees of former felons. (Floridians voted overwhelmingly in a 2018 referendum to allow former felons to vote. The GOP-led legislature effectively scuttled the initiative by passing a law requiring that the ex-felons pay outstanding fines and court fees. Challenges are wending their way through the courts.)

Florida's Republican attorney general says Bloomberg's donation may be criminal and wants the feds to investigate.

10. Jeffrey and Janine Yass

Amount given so far: More than \$13 million, mostly to Republicans.

Jeffrey Yass, a trader who co-founded the Susquehanna International Group, is the lone libertarian on the list.

In the 2016 cycle he gave \$2.8 million to Kentucky Sen. Rand Paul's campaign.

Major beneficiaries of his largesse include Save the Children and the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank.

12. Deborah Simon

Amount given so far: \$12.5 million to Democrats.

Simon is the daughter of Mel Simon, the late billionaire businessman and movie producer who was involved in Jewish philanthropy. Deborah Simon and her sister, Cynthia Simon-Skjodt, have long given to progressive and Jewish causes such as the ADL.

Based in Indiana, Simon has been a longtime ideological opponent of Mike Pence, the vice president and former governor of the state known in part for his anti-abortion stance. This year, she has said she will “do anything” to unseat Trump.

Simon also donates to the US Holocaust Museum.

13. Henry and Marsha Laufer

Amount given so far: \$11.8 million to Democrats

Henry Laufer worked closely with James Simons at his pioneering Renaissance Technologies, a quantitative hedge fund and also became a billionaire. Marsha Laufer, his wife, was the Democratic Party chair in the Long Island, New York, town of Brookhaven for seven years.

Outside of the presidential race, the Laufers have given to several individual Democratic politicians, including Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz of Florida.

16. Joshua and Anita Bekenstein

Amount given so far: Nearly \$11 million to Democrats.

Joshua Bekenstein is a co-chairman of Bain, the global finance company co-founded by Mitt Romney, the former Republican presidential candidate and now Utah senator.

Along with his wife, Bekenstein has given to an array of candidates and PACs this cycle, as well as to the Democratic Party. Residents of suburban Boston, they also operate a donor-advised fund through the Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Boston.

18. Bernard and Billi Wilma Marcus

Amount given so far: \$9.7 million, all to Republicans save for \$6,900 to Democrats.

Marcus, 91, co-founded Home Depot and has long been a major donor to Jewish causes, looming large in the Atlanta area.

This year he took on the Jewish Future Pledge, dedicating at least 50% of his charitable giving to Jewish causes, and his eponymous foundation gave \$20 million to the Jewish Education Project to help lower the cost of youth trips to Israel.

Marcus is all in for Trump. His pro-Trump posture — he gave Trump’s campaign \$7 million in 2016 — has led to boycotts of Home Depot, although he retired as the hardware chain’s chairman in 2002.

The New York Times, reporting last week that the Republicans were trying to get the Green Party on the presidential ballot to siphon votes from Biden, revealed that Marcus funded an identical campaign in 2016. It may have worked: The votes for the Greens were greater than the margin of Trump's key victories in Wisconsin and Michigan.

Marcus also backs congressional candidate Laura Loomer in South Florida. Mainstream GOP Jews have endeavored to ignore Loomer, who is Jewish and a self-declared Islamophobe.

She's run a campaign that has incurred the wrath of mainstream Jewish groups for likening Democrats to Nazis. Trump has endorsed Loomer — he lives in the district.

22. Paul Singer

Amount given so far: \$8.8 million to Republicans.

Singer, 76, is a hedge funder who has a tenuous relationship with Trump and was the initial funder of the opposition research that led to revelations about Russian attempts to infiltrate the Trump campaign.

But by last year he was on the Trump train, saying Democrats posed a socialist threat to the US.

23. Stephen and Susan Mandel

Amount given so far: \$8.8 million to Democrats.

Stephen Mandel, a hedge fund manager, and his wife both grew up in Jewish families. Their philanthropic giving has centered on education issues.

This year, in addition to donating to Democratic candidates across the country, Mandel has donated \$2 million to the Lincoln Project, a PAC founded by former Republicans to prevent Trump from winning reelection.

24. George Soros

Amount given so far: \$8.2 million to Democrats.

Soros, 90, is a Hungarian-born Holocaust survivor who made his billions as a hedge funder. He launched his philanthropy in the 1970s, advancing democratic movements in South Africa and then as the Soviet empire began to crumble, in Central and Eastern Europe. His emphasis was the introduction of free markets, which first earned him praise from conservatives.

That dissipated once he turned his attention to liberal and Democratic politics. He spent a record \$27 million in 2004 to oust George W. Bush, including millions on MoveOn, the group that along with the Howard Dean campaign set the standard that year for online fundraising.

Adelson has said that Soros' outsized '04 spending spurred his own big spending: In the 2008 cycle, the casino magnate spent \$30 million on Freedom's Watch, a failed effort to set up a conservative counterpart to MoveOn, and Adelson broke spending records in 2012 in a losing bid to unseat Barack Obama — at least \$100 million.

Soros within the Jewish world has staked out a confrontational posture, deriding AIPAC in 2007 as overly influential and the next year becoming the main funder of J Street, a liberal rival to the pro-Israel giant. His foundation, Open Society, has also funded civil society groups in Israel that are sharply critical of its government.

25. Steve and Connie Ballmer

Amount given so far: \$7.5 million to Democratic groups.

Steve Ballmer is the former Microsoft CEO and current owner of the NBA's Los Angeles Clippers. His mother was Jewish and, through her, he is related to the late Jewish comic Gilda Radner.

At Microsoft, he sat on a council of world leaders convened by the Jewish National Fund and made multiple trips to Israel to ramp up Microsoft operations there.

This year, almost all of Ballmer's giving — \$7 million — went to Everytown for Gun Safety Victory Fund, the PAC associated with the gun control advocacy movement. Connie Ballmer gave \$500,000 to Unite the Country, a PAC that is supporting Biden.