

PACs Weigh In With Freshmen

2/15/95 per [unclear]
 Group Contributions Represent 45 Percent of 1995 Donations in House

By R.H. Melton
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The reform-minded freshman class elected to the House last fall after promising new ways of doing business in Congress turned to that old reliable source of Washington funds—the PAC community—for nearly half its money this year, according to an analysis issued yesterday by Common Cause.

The study of Federal Election Commission records by the public interest lobby group found that PAC contributions accounted for 45 percent, or \$5 million, of the \$11 million raised by the 85 freshmen in the first six months of 1995.

Common Cause was critical of what it described as a sharp uptick in PAC giving to freshmen, most of them Republicans who helped capture the House last year for the GOP for the first time in more than a generation.

"The freshmen have become instant incumbents, behaving like incumbents and raising money like incumbents," said Common Cause president Ann McBride. "It shows how rotten and corrosive the system is. . . . It's not benign money, it's interested money."

McBride renewed her organization's long-standing call for reforms in the way political campaigns are financed, saying the freshmen had been "reaping huge sums of special-interest money from the very system they were elected to change. They were accepting this money in the middle of passing legislation that had major impact on major interest groups in the country."

Rep. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr., a moderate Republican from suburban Baltimore who collected half his money from PACs this year, disagreed with McBride, saying, "I don't see undue influence of any group. Most of the members of this class ran on the platforms of beliefs they had in earlier elections or their own philosophy."

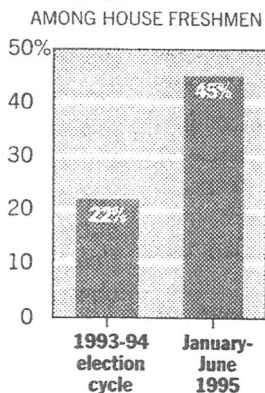
"The fact is, the availability of PAC money helped me even the playing field" against a far wealthier opponent, Ehrlich said. "Secondly, a lot of business groups supported me, but my issues came before their support."

PAC money has long been a staple of congressional politics, both Republican and Democratic, but new

HOUSE FRESHMEN PLOW PACs

FIRST-TIME MEMBERS ELECTED IN 1994 RAISE
 NEARLY \$5 MILLION IN SIX MONTHS

► PAC contributions as a percentage of total campaign contributions



► Top 10 freshmen PAC recipients

JAN. 1-JUNE 30, 1995

Representative	PAC Receipts
John Ensign (R-Nev.)	\$196,854
Daniel Frisa (R-N.Y.)	161,050
Frank A. Cremeans (R-Ohio)	157,383
Jon Christensen (R-Neb.)	136,750
Charles W. Norwood Jr. (R-Ga.)	125,430
Greg Ganske (R-Iowa)	112,441
Randy J. Tate (R-Wash.)	106,001
Thomas M. Davis III (R-Va.)	105,900
Brian P. Bilbray (R-Calif.)	100,475
David M. McIntosh (R-Ind.)	99,403

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studies such as the Common Cause survey suggest a surge in corporate giving in the aftermath of the GOP takeover of the House.

Leaders of some PACs suggested yesterday that while the atmosphere in Congress had changed sharply, with a new fervor for deregulation and smaller government, little had changed in the underlying reasons PACs give to favored candidates. As a general rule, PACs said they were far less interested in a candidate's views on congressional reform than in how that person would vote on an issue that mattered to an industry.

For instance, Michael L. Kerley, a vice president for government affairs at the National Association of Life Underwriters, said while he heard a number of candidates debate congressional reform during the campaign, those views were not factors in his PAC's decisions to make contributions.

"Their reform-mindedness was not a major element in the decision-making . . . as much as how we look how a member relates to life insurance."

Kerley, a 26-year veteran of lobbying Congress, said the \$46,000 his group of 130,000 life and health insurance agents gave immediately after the November elections was a fraction of the \$1.3 million the association's PAC gave during the two-year election cycle.

"We don't look at it through the prism of social issues," Kerley said.

"We look at it through the prism of business issues."

Kerley's PAC was the second-largest giver in the eight weeks after Election Day, behind United Parcel Service (\$57,000) but ahead of the National Rifle Association (\$45,550), Common Cause said.

During that period, 75 of the freshmen received \$811,000 from PACs that had not given to them during the campaign, the study found, and eight of the members received more than \$25,000 each in first-time contributions from PACs.

Rep. Thomas M. Davis III (R-Va.), a leading recipient of PAC money in the first half of this year—\$105,900, or 27 percent of his contributions—said he favored the abolition of PACs and raising limits on individual giving.

"People ought to be able to give and PACs are nothing more than employees who pool their money for that purpose," Davis said. "However, too much emphasis is placed on it. The way I would get around it is tell people they have to raise money in their own district. That would be the fairest way on everybody."

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For a state-by-state look at key 1996 primary dates, see *Digital Ink*, The Post's on-line service. To learn about *Digital Ink*, call 1-800-510-5104, ext. 9000.