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Paterson mayor's fund of campaign cash dwarfs others

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PATERSON — His campaign net stretches from real estate concerns in Paterson to relatives in Puerto Rico.



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Paterson Mayor Joey Torres and supporters leaving from Jersey City for the 'Spirit of Paterson' cruise.

He draws from a broad range of supporters, from builders to city workers, retail stores to go-go clubs, and even a pickle supplier.

At nearly \$850,000 and counting, his money-raising prowess dwarfs the competition.

As election day approaches, Paterson Mayor Joey Torres has outraised and outspent his opponents by a ratio of at least 17-to-1, displaying unusually prolific fund-raising abilities inside and beyond the city.

Nearly two-thirds of the contributions of more than \$300 since 2007 have come from outside Paterson, with funds coming from a business as far away as Colorado, a campaign finance analysis by The Record shows.

Among his chief benefactors are more than 100 people and companies involved in real estate and construction, donating at least \$165,000, while city workers and other public employees

have kicked in at least another \$43,000. Lawyers and law firms have put up more than \$40,000 while unions have contributed at least another \$13,000.

Beyond the heavy-hitters are hundreds of smaller donors, including local retailers, laundry services, go-go clubs and even a city pickle company.

The top recipients of spending from the Torres campaign by far have been The Brownstone, the West Broadway banquet and event space, and a party yacht that operates from Hudson piers in New York City.

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Each has hosted various functions for the Torres campaign.

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"It seems to be a lot of money to raise in Paterson, which is not considered a wealthy place," said Ingrid Reed, a policy analyst at Rutgers University's Eagleton Institute of Politics. "The other reason it sounds impressive is that it doesn't appear to be a competitive race."

Second in fund raising

A state Election Law Enforcement Commission report released April 14 shows that Torres raised the second-highest amount for this municipal election cycle — \$848,610 — behind the \$7 million Newark Mayor Corey Booker raised among an 11-member coalition.

Torres dismissed the notion that he was a shoe-in.

"I take all races competitively. I believe there is a competition when you have two others vying for your seat," Torres said, about the contenders for the mayoralty, Council President Jeffery Jones and Councilman Andre Sayegh.

He said his fund raising reflected broad support.

"I have middle-class America, I have working-class America and I have corporate America," he said. The money "just gives me the necessary tools I need to deliver the message of my accomplishments over the last eight years."

Between postage stamps and television advertisements, running a political campaign in the state's third largest city is costly, he said.

His opponents have a different take on his money-raising.

Looking to win big

Jones, a councilman at large, and Sayegh, who represents the 6th Ward, each said they're undaunted by the hundreds of thousands Torres has raised.

Jones, who has raised \$41,859, according the April campaign finance report, questioned the mayor's need for so much cash.

"If I need \$800,000 to get my message across, then I have a big problem," Jones said. "If for the last eight years, I haven't gotten my message across then I have an even bigger problem."

Sayegh has raised \$48,186, according to the April report.

"The mayor prefers to raise a million dollars. I'd rather shake a million hands," he said.

Former Paterson Mayor Pat Kramer recalls that when he ran for election in 1966, he raised \$133,000. He said things were different then; candidates did not start fund raising three years before their next election. At most, it was eight months in advance.

Torres likely needs to raise a lot of money so that he can win big, Kramer said, which is especially important if Torres aspires to higher office some day, such the state Legislature or Congress.

"The bigger you win, the less competition you get. If I'm running against you and you beat me by an eyelash, there's other people interested in taking a shot at you," he said. "If you slaughter me, there are less candidates to take you on."

The biggest donors

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The Record analysis found that from January 2007 to January 2010, the Torres campaign raked in \$805,845. Nearly a third of the contributions of more than \$300 came from people in construction, development or real estate.

A report filed in April showed that the trend continued, with Torres bringing in \$59,575 for the year's first quarter.

New Jersey election law permits individual donors, corporations and unions to contribute no more than \$2,600 to a candidate during any election.

Some contributions have been refunded by the campaign over time.

The largest specific donors include:

- * American Hose and Hydraulics of Paterson and people associated with the company, who contributed at least \$20,425. The company received \$242,515 in city contracts in 2009.
- * The Newark law firm of Lite DePalma Greenberg & Rivas and its lawyers, who gave at least \$12,700.
- * People associated with United Paterson Enterprise, a scrap metal business, contributed more than \$8,500.
- * The city police union gave \$8,475 and the firefighters union donated \$3,900.

One of the largest individual benefactors has been Glenn L. Brown, city police director, who made six donations totaling \$5,250. Ed Farmer, president of a Caldwell management consulting firm and former chief of staff to Rep. Bill Pascrell Jr., gave \$3,150. A third large donor is Nick Tsapatsaris, a Ridgewood engineer and developer of the downtown Center City mall, who gave \$4,500. Portions of Brown's and Tsapatsaris's donations were returned by the campaign because they exceeded legal limits.

Torres's own relatives also have helped: his father, Juan Torres-Soto, donated \$3,000.

Torres's campaign treasurer could not be reached to explain contributions that appeared to have exceeded the limit.

Nearly one in five donors identified in Torres' reports gave at least \$2,000. Those listed as giving less include the Paterson Pickle Co. (\$975), the Clifton-based Cremation Society of New Jersey (\$1,750), and the Sunrise Gentleman's Club in Totowa (\$600).

Some of Torres's leading donors had differing views on why they give and what, if anything, they expect to gain.

"We believe that the mayor has done a good job with regard to economic development and we definitely are contributing to his campaign for that purpose," said Tsapatsaris, of Center City Partners LLC. He and his partners in the downtown mall project gave at least \$11,850.

Tspatsaris said he expected nothing from the mayor in exchange for his contributions and that the company and its employees "support candidates that share their vision for the city."

Another contributor said he donated because Torres is a friend.

"He can't do anything for us; we don't live in Paterson," said Thomas McNamara, a retired Ramsey police officer who owns the New Jersey Cremation Society of Clifton.

McNamara said he usually pays for a table for himself and his employees when the Torres campaign hosts a fund-raiser at the Brownstone. "It's more of a social function for us."

Jerry Dobriner, who owns Paterson-based American Hose and Hydraulics, which contracts with the city to repair hydraulic pumps, hoses and heavy equipment, said his employees attend Torres fund-raisers because

When his employees see tickets on Dobriner's desk for glamorous Torres fund-raising affairs, "They all want to go. Everybody wants to go," he said.

Dobriner said he's never asked an employee to give a contribution. And he's never asked Torres for anything in exchange for his employees' generous contributions.

"I would be the last one to ask him for a favor. Because I would never want to see this good man have anything adverse written about him or talked about him," he said.

However, Reed said many contributors believe that giving politicians money reminds elected officials of their stake in government.

"It provides access. That candidate will always take the phone calls of people that have given them significant funding," Reed said.

PBA regret

In an indication of the connection between donations and access, Steve Olimpio, president of the Paterson Police Benevolent Association, said he now regretted the monetary support his union has provided Torres because the mayor threatened to lay off police officers if they refused to take furloughs. Since 2007, the union contributed \$8,475 to the mayor's re-election campaign.

"He's never going to get another contribution from us again," Olimpio said.

Reed, of the Eagleton Institute, said increasingly some municipal races are costing as much as statewide races.

"Local elections are starting to have the same characteristics of campaigns for larger areas," Reed said. "You hire a campaign manager, you do fancy brochures, you do television advertising, you do polling," she said, ticking off examples of expenses.

Staff Writers Thomas Vaubourg and Daniel Galioto contributed to this article. E-mail: mandell@northjersey.com



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1. Sunday May 2, 2010, 11:32 AM - **wiseone** says:
"There's no good parties in this city unless you want to go to a bar and worry for your life," said Dobriner, a Mahwah resident who is a member of the mayor's campaign finance committee. That's the greatest plug for the city of Paterson I've ever heard. Mayor Josey really knows how to pick'em. Two thirds of donations come from outside the city ??? Not expecting anything in return ??? Go look at yourselves in a mirror and ask that question. Just trying to further their enterprises on the back of a struggling city.
2. Sunday May 2, 2010, 10:33 AM - **ataloss** says:
Mr Jones, you have just flunked the test to win the mayoral campaign by virtue of your question as to why the mayor needs to raise that much cash. The correct answer was 'A', TO WIN.

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