

POLITICS

Anti-Caldwell Super PAC May Have Broken Campaign Laws

Save Our City spent nearly \$200,000 on anti-Caldwell ads, but it hasn't been telling voters where the money came from.

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Tuesday's big political revelation was that Dennis Mitsunaga, a well-connected contractor who's known for making major campaign donations to candidates, was [bankrolling the anti-Kirk Caldwell super PAC](#) Save Our City.

But voters should have known Mitsunaga was backing the PAC weeks ago when it first began airing advertisements attacking Honolulu's mayor for poor leadership and inadequate responses to some of the biggest challenges facing the city.

That's because a state law passed in 2013 requires super PACs to name their top three donors who helped pay for any political ads that are published or circulated via print, broadcast or other electronic means. That disclosure must be included in the advertisement itself.



Hawaii Campaign Spending Commission Executive Director Kristin Izumi-Nitao says her office is well aware of the problems Save Our City has had following campaign spending rules.

A top donor is defined as anyone who has given \$10,000 or more to a super PAC within a year prior to the purchase of an advertisement.

Mitsunaga easily meets the criteria. [Hawaii Campaign Spending Commission](#) reports show he [personally gave \\$170,000](#) to Save Our City, which is nearly two-thirds of the total \$273,190 the super PAC collected from donors from Sept. 27 to Oct. 24.

The next biggest donors are Amana Associates, a company managed by Mitsunaga, and Sam Hyun, the president of [MCE International](#), a Honolulu-based mechanical engineering firm.

Hawaii Campaign Spending Commission Executive Director Kristin Izumi-Nitao said her agency is aware of the situation involving Save Our City, and said it will be a topic of discussion among the commissioners. She said she has also been in talks with officials from the super PAC.

Save Our City was recently fined \$125 by the commission for violating rules that require disclosures indicating that advertisements have not been approved by a specific candidate.

Save Our City has also [failed to file](#) the required [electioneering communications notices](#) with the Campaign Spending Commission when it spends more than \$2,000 on campaign advertising. According to the the latest campaign spending reports, Save Our City spent [nearly \\$200,000](#) on advertising as of Oct. 24.

Izumi-Nitao said she is aware of that situation also.

Mitsunaga issued a written statement through his daughter, Lois Mitsunaga, who is treasurer of his company, Mitsunaga & Associates. She is also a major donor to the Save Our City, having given at least \$10,000 to the super PAC.

“At the time, we were unaware that we violated state campaign spending laws because we are new at this,” Mitsunaga said. “However, our attorney Sheri Tanaka has been working with the Campaign Spending Commission to fix this. Also, the Campaign Spending Commission has acknowledged that we are new at this so they have been helping us.”

Sarah Houghtailing, chairwoman of Save Our City, did not return a phone call seeking comment.

Both Caldwell and his challenger, former Congressman Charles Djou, held press conferences Tuesday [denouncing the influence](#) of outside money in the campaign.

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