

## POLITICS

# Hirono's Pineapple PAC Seeks To Help Dems Retake The US Senate

The Hawaii senator's political action committee also donates to U.S. House candidates, party committees and even a Los Angeles city supervisor.

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ABOUT 9 HOURS AGO • By Chad Blair   

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If the U.S. Senate returns to Democratic control in November, Mazie Hirono might deserve a little credit.

Since late 2012, the Hawaii senator's political action committee has contributed tens of thousands of dollars to federal candidates, most of them Senate incumbents or challengers, and all of them Democrats.

All told, Hirono's Pineapple PAC has raised more than \$470,000 and spent most of it as of March, according to the Center for Responsive Politics' [Open Secrets](#) and [Federal Election Commission](#) records.

Recipients have included successful Senate candidates such as Al Franken of Minnesota, Jeff Merkley of Oregon and Mark Warner of Virginia.



*Sen. Mazie Hirono in Civil Beat's offices in April.*

Some of the money went to losing campaigns, such as those of incumbents Mark Pryor of Arkansas and Mary Landrieu of Louisiana, as well as challenger Alison Lundergan Grimes of Kentucky, who was defeated by Republican Mitch McConnell.

On balance, Hirono's PAC has backed more winners than losers, something of an accomplishment given that the Senate fell to Republican control in the tea party revolt of 2014.

This year, Hirono-supported candidates include Tammy Duckworth of Illinois, a House representative with Hawaii ties who is running for the Senate, and Sen. Sherrod Brown of Ohio.

Other candidates include Rep. Mark Takai of Hawaii and Rep. Mike Honda of California.

Also receiving donations in recent years were the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, Los Angeles City Supervisor Hilda Solis, the Oahu County Democratic

Committee and the Democratic Party of Hawaii.

## PAC Men And Women

A spokesperson for Hirono declined to comment about Pineapple PAC. But it is not uncommon for U.S. senators to form PACs.

They do so to help their colleagues and potential colleagues, and to favor candidates with similar views and backgrounds.

Multi-candidate PACs like Hirono's may [give up to \\$5,000](#) to each candidate or candidate committee per election cycle, and up to \$15,000 to a national party committee per calendar year.



Chad Blair/Civil Beat

*Despite the increasing diversity of America, Congress remains heavily dominated by white males.*

Pineapple PAC's money comes from a variety of sources. Open Secrets reported that in 2015, top industries that donated to the PAC included defense and aerospace, sea

transport, lawyers and law firms, lodging and tourism and retail sales.

FEC records list many familiar local interests among contributors, such as Richard Dahl of James Campbell Co., Patrick Shin of Nan Inc., Navatek executive Martin Kao, Constance Lau of Hawaiian Electric Industries and several executives with Alexander & Baldwin.

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National donors include defense contractors like General Dynamics, labor groups like the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, retailers like Walmart, media interests like Comcast and NBC Universal and leisure groups like the American Resort Development Association.

NextEra Energy's PAC also gave to Pineapple.

Among the top beneficiaries of Pineapple spending are two Washington, D.C.-based companies: AKM Consulting (for fundraising) and Capitol Compliance Associates (for compliance and accounting services.) A third D.C. business, NGP Van (for database software), also received notable disbursements.

Why the name Pineapple PAC for Hirono? PAC names often connect with senators' home states. Patrick Leahy of Vermont, for example, runs Green Mountain PAC.

The late Dan Inouye of Hawaii ran the DANPAC.

*Hawaii's other U.S. senator, Brian Schatz, has a Hawaii PAC — which Civil Beat will report on Thursday.*

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Somehow, I don't think that this is a good process, corporations buying votes, no matter the name.

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This is one way big money weakens ties among citizens and their representatives. PAC's serve to obscure the origin of funds contributed to politicians, which works against transparency. In a healthy democracy, citizens should know whose money is seeking to influence their representatives--this is part of what it takes to have an "informed electorate."

Hirono's PAC, like others, contributes funds to political candidates who don't represent Hirono. Why should a Hawai'i resident influence an election for Los Angeles City Supervisor? Democracy is weakened when elected officials are beholden to interests outside of the people they were elected to represent.

A simple rule would greatly strengthen American democracy: politicians can only accept contributions from residents of the district they represent or seek to represent.

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