

## **Health Industry Contributions to Alaska’s Congressional Senators**

### **Alaska Center for Public Policy**

an independent, non-partisan, non-profit think tank advancing  
public policy that benefits low- and medium-income families in Alaska

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The Alaska Center for Public Policy (ACPP) is an independent, non-partisan, non-profit think tank established in 2004. The Center is committed to the development of public policies and programs that improve the economic and social wellbeing of individuals, families, and communities in Alaska.

### About the authors

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## **Executive Summary**

A recent report shows that major healthcare interests have spent 1.4 million dollars per day this year, lobbying Congress [1]. Political action committees and individuals associated with industries in the health sector, each of which are intimately involved in the nation's ongoing health care reform debate, have donated more to federal candidates during the second quarter of 2009 than the first quarter of this year, according to an analysis done by the Center for Responsive Politics. Among the highest increases was the Health Services/HMOs industry, which includes health insurance companies, with a spending increase of 37 percent during the second quarter of 2009. [23]

The health sector spent more than any other sector lobbying to Congress during the second quarter of this year as well, spending \$133 million. [24] Within the health sector, the pharmaceutical/health products industry ranked the highest, with \$68 million going to lobbying in the second quarter alone. [24]

Alaska's senators, Mark Begich and Lisa Murkowski, are among the federal legislators receiving donations from industries in the health sector. Senator Lisa Murkowski, who has been in the United States Senate since 2002, was recently appointed to the Health, Education, Labor and Pension committee, a committee frequently targeted by health sector lobbyists. As of November 23, 2009, she has received \$397,333 from the health sector throughout her entire congressional career [8]. Senator Murkowski's top direct health contributors are Blue Cross & Blue Shield, Pfizer Inc., the American Medical Association, the American Osteopathic Association, and GlaxoSmithKline [8].

Since his election in 2008, Senator Begich has received a total of \$115,733 in health sector contributions from the four health sector industries (not including other health interest contributions). The Alaska Heart Institute, the American College of Emergency Physicians, and the American College of Radiology represent three of the health sector contributors from the health professionals industry.

## **Health Sector Contribution Trends: The Big Picture**

The Center for Responsive Politics gives the following background information and overview on the health sector contribution trends among all members of Congress:

### **Health: Background**

Physicians and other health professionals are traditionally the largest source of federal campaign contributions in this sector, which contributed a record \$166.8 million to federal candidates during the 2008 election cycle. Aside from doctors'

associations, pharmaceutical companies and HMOs are consistently generous givers.

While health insurers, doctors' associations and pharmaceutical companies have publicly voiced support for universal health care, they largely oppose President Barack Obama's plan to institute a public health insurance option. They also disagree on tort reform. Doctors support capping malpractice liabilities, while the president and most Democrats resist this change.

Yet aside from the most controversial—and, as some consumer advocates say, the most necessary—aspect of reform, these companies have established consensus with the White House and the Democratic-controlled Congress on other provisions. Any health reform legislation that passes during Obama's presidency will most likely include a mandate requiring every American to purchase health insurance. Hospitals and drug companies have also agreed to help pay for reform, cutting deals with Senate leaders to reduce Medicare spending and pharmaceutical prices.

The health sector's [lobbying efforts](#) have gone into overdrive in 2009. This collection of companies, which includes "[heavy hitters](#)" such as [AFLAC](#), the [American Medical Association](#) (the second all-time leading lobbyist) and [Eli Lilly](#), is spending more than \$1 million per day to push their views on health care in the halls of Congress and federal agencies. This intensity is not terribly surprising, since only the finance sector has spent more on lobbying since 1998. [Excerpt taken from: 21]

There has been a recent shift in the political party focus of contributions from lobbyists and industries in the pharmaceutical and health sector. In general, the health sector as a whole has traditionally given more often to Republican candidates and parties. However, certain industries, such as nurses, tend to donate more money to Democrats. The shift in health sector contributions from Republicans to Democrats has paralleled the Democrats' rise in power in Washington.

Specifically, as of the 2008 election cycle, Democrats have received more money from the health sector than Republicans [2]. This shift happened for the first time since the 1992 election cycle. In the current political arena, the results of this trend can be seen by the percentage of recipients in either party by the four health sector industries. Table One below lists each of these industries, the total amounts donated, and the percentage donated to members of the Democrat and Republican parties.

**Table 1. Contributions by Health Sector to All Democrats and Republicans, 2009-2010**  
**(Latest data are available from July 21, 2009)**

Rank	Industry	Total	Percent Democrat Recipient	Percent Republican Recipient
2	Health Professionals	\$4,267,370	66	34
15	Pharmaceutical/Health Products	\$1,475,872	62	38
23	Hospitals/Nursing Homes	\$1,153,005	77	23
39	Health Services/HMO	\$557,548	65	35

SOURCE: [OpenSecrets.org](http://OpenSecrets.org) [5]

**Comparison of Health Sector Contributions to Alaska’s Congressional Senators**

The table below lists the career totals for Senators Murkowski and Begich for the four categories of health sector contributions. Direct comparisons among the members cannot be made due to differences in length of time in office (e.g. “career”).

**Table 2. Career Total Health Sector Contributions to Alaska Members of Congress  
(Current as of November 23, 2009)**

	<b>Murkowski</b>	<b>Begich</b>
<b>Office</b>	Senate	Senate
<b>Party</b>	Republican	Democrat
<b>Health Sector Total</b>	\$397,333	\$115,733
<b>Health Insurance (Health Services/HMOs)</b>	\$86,450	\$16,800
<b>Pharmaceutical</b>	\$87,050	10,300
<b>Health Professionals</b>	\$230,983	\$88,283
<b>Hospitals/Nursing Homes</b>	\$45,750	\$6,200

SOURCE: [OpenSecrets.org](http://OpenSecrets.org) [20]

**Contributions by Health Sector to Alaska’s Congressional Senators  
Top Ten Donors: Tables 3 & 4**

The following two tables display the top ten rankings for health sector contributions for each of Alaska’s Senatorial members of Congress.

- Column One: displays the ranking given to the contributor based on the total amount contributed for the specified time period. Donors giving identical amounts are listed as having the same ranking.
- Column Two: the donor’s affiliated organization. Note that the organizations themselves did not donate, rather the money came from the organization's Political Action Committee, its individual members or employees or owners, and those individuals' immediate families [4].

- Column Three: represents the type of contributor, with the categories political action committee (PAC), lobbying firm, labor union, or individual contributor.
- Column Four: indicates the health sector category of the donor.
- Column Five shows the dollar total contribution amount over the specified period.

There are four categories (i.e. industries) of health sector contributors included in the tables below:

- Health sector contributions from the four health sector industries:
  - health professionals,
  - hospitals & nursing homes,
  - health insurance (health services/HMOs), and
  - pharmaceuticals/health products [5].

For consistency, data for Senator Murkowski are analyzed beginning with the first campaign/election cycle (i.e. 2001-2002), and are reported from 2001-2010. Because his election to the Senate began in 2008, data for Senator Mark Begich are reported from 2008-2010. The health sector contributor rankings below were selected and reordered from “all contributor” rankings provided by the Center for Responsive Politics. Comments follow each table.

### **Senator Lisa Murkowski: Top Health Sector Contributors**

Senator Murkowski was appointed to the Senate in December 2002, and was elected to a full six-year Senate term in November 2004. She is the senior Republican member of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, and serves on the Senate Appropriations Committee. In 2007, Senator Murkowski became a member of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, and is a member of the Senate Indian Affairs Committee. In 2009, Senator Murkowski was elected by her fellow Republican senators to serve as the Vice Chair of the Senate Republican Conference for the 111th Congress [17].

**Table 3. Top Twelve Health Sector Contributions to Senator Murkowski, 2002-2010**  
**Current as of November 27, 2009**

<b>Ranking</b>	<b>Contributor</b>	<b>Contributor Type</b>	<b>Health Sector and/or Other Health Issue Interest</b>	<b>Total, \$</b>
1	Blue Cross/Blue Shield	PAC, Individual	Health Insurance, Medicare	38,500
2	Home Depot	PAC	All Health Issues	30,000
3	ConocoPhillips	PAC, Lobbying Firm, Individual	All Health Issues	25,600
4	Bluegrass Committee	PAC	All Health Sector	25,000
5	Blank Rome LLP	PAC, Lobbying Firm, Individual	All Health Issues, Medical Research	22,700
6	Patton Boggs LLP	PAC, Lobbying Firm, Individual	All Health Issues	20,075
7	Northern Lights PAC	Leadership PAC	Hospitals/Nursing Homes	20,000
8	Wal-Mart Stores	PAC, Lobbying Firm	All Health Issues, Pharmaceutical	18,000
9	Pfizer Inc	PAC, Individual	Pharmaceutical	13,300
10	Target Corp	PAC, Individual	All Health Issues	12,400
11	Cassidy & Assoc/Interpublic Group	Lobbying Firm, Individual	All Health Issues	11,500
12	GlaxoSmithKline	PAC	Pharmaceutical	10,000
12	Akin, Gump et al	Lobbying Firm, PAC, Individual	Medicare and Medicaid Issues	10,000
12	American Medical Assn	PAC	Health Professionals	10,000

Ranking	Contributor	Contributor Type	Health Sector and/or Other Health Issue Interest	Total, \$
12	American Osteopathic Assn	PAC	Health Professionals; Medicare/Medicaid, Medical Research & Clinical Laboratories; All Health Issues	10,000
12	Comm. for the Preservation of Capitalism	Leadership PAC	Pharmaceutical/Health Products; Health Professionals; Hospitals/Nursing Homes	10,000

SOURCE: [OpenSecrets.org](http://OpenSecrets.org) [11 & 13]

### **Comments**

Senator Lisa Murkowski has been in the United States Senate since 2002. As of November 23, 2009, she has received \$397,333 from the health sector throughout her entire congressional career [8]. Senator Murkowski’s top direct health contributors are Blue Cross & Blue Shield, Pfizer Inc., the American Medical Association, the American Osteopathic Association, and GlaxoSmithKline [8]. Between 2002 and 2008 (latest available data), Murkowski received 45 percent of her donations from Alaska, and the remaining 55 percent from other states [19]. The majority of her donations were received while raising campaign money between 2002-2004 (\$281,700).

During the 2007-2008 cycle, Senator Murkowski became a member of the Health, Education, Labor and Pension (HELP) Senate Committee. This was a crucial nomination, as this committee plays a key role in legislative decisions on health care. Consequently, the members of this committee are major targets for health sector lobbyists. During a critical vote on version of health reform legislation in July 2009, members voting ‘no’ on the bill received, on average, more donations from the health sector. This difference was most pronounced in the pharmaceutical/health products industry, where members voting ‘no’ received \$266,182, on average, more than members voting ‘yes’ on that particular health reform bill. [25] Thus, Murkowski’s placement on this committee makes her a top interest for health sector contributors.

Blue Cross/Blue Shield is the biggest donor to politicians since 1989, and is a major health industry contributor for all members of Congress. Since her HELP committee assignment, Blue Cross/Blue Shield contributed \$13,000 more than in the previous cycle (2005-2006), moving it from the fifth position to a top health interest contributor in the third position. She received all of these funds from Political Action Committees. Senator Murkowski’s top health contributor for 2002-2010 is Blue Cross/Blue Shield (BC/BS), which has contributed a total of \$38,500 throughout her career. Of these BC/BS contributions, \$4,000 is from individuals, and the remaining \$34,500 is from PACs [11 & 13].

## **Senator Mark Begich: Top Ten Health Sector Contributors**

Senator Mark Begich was elected to the U.S. Senate in November 2008 after serving as the Mayor of Anchorage since April 2003. Senator Begich was appointed to the Senate Committee on Science, Commerce and Transportation, the Senate Committee on Armed Services, and the Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs. Senator Begich's service on the Commerce Committee includes assignments to the Subcommittee on Aviation; Subcommittee on Communications; Subcommittee on Competiveness, Innovation, and U.S. export Promotion; Subcommittee on Oceans, Fisheries, and Coast Guard; and the Subcommittee on Surface Transportation. In the Armed Services Committee Senator Begich serves on the Subcommittee on AirLand, the Subcommittee on Personnel, and the Subcommittee on Strategic Forces. [16]

Table 4 below shows the top contributors from the Health Sector to Mark Begich from 2008-2010. Rankings apply to total amount of contribution from health sector contributors. Overall rankings can be found online [14]. SOURCE: [OpenSecrets.org](http://OpenSecrets.org) [14]

**Table 4. Top Health Sector Contributions to Senator Mark Begich, 2008-2010  
Current as of November 23, 2009**

<b>Ranking</b>	<b>Contributor</b>	<b>Contributor Type</b>	<b>Health Sector and/ or Other Health Issue Interest</b>	<b>Total \$</b>
1	Patton Boggs LLP	PAC, Lobbying Firm, Individual	All Health Issues	23,437
2	AFSCME	Labor Union	All Health Issues	12,500
3	AFL-CIO	Labor Union, PAC, Individual	All Health Issues	11,250
4	American Association for Justice	PAC, Individual	All Health Issues	10,250
4	Service Employees International Union	Labor Union, PAC, Individual	All Health Issues	10,250
5	America Works	Leadership PAC	Health Professionals; Hospitals/Nursing Homes	10,000
5	America's Leadership PAC	Leadership PAC	Health Professionals; Hospitals/Nursing Homes	10,000
5	DAKPAC	Leadership PAC	Health Professionals; Hospitals/Nursing Homes; Pharmaceutical/Health Products	10,000
5	First State PAC	Leadership PAC	Hospitals/Nursing Homes; Pharmaceutical/Health Products	10,000
5	Fund for the Majority	Leadership PAC	Pharmaceutical/Health Products	10,000
5	Impact	Leadership PAC	Health Professionals; Hospitals/Nursing Homes	10,000
5	International Association of Fire Fighters	Labor Union, PAC	All Health Issues	10,000
5	Leadership in the New Century	Leadership PAC	Health Professionals; Hospitals/Nursing Homes	10,000

<b>Ranking</b>	<b>Contributor</b>	<b>Contributor Type</b>	<b>Health Sector and/ or Other Health Issue Interest</b>	<b>Total \$</b>
5	National Leadership PAC	Leadership PAC	Health Professionals	10,000
5	National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare	PAC	Medicare	10,000
5	Searchlight Leadership Fund	Leadership PAC	Health Professionals; Hospitals/Nursing Homes; Pharmaceutical/Health Products	10,000
5	Sheet Metal Workers Union	Labor Union, PAC	All Health Issues	10,000
5	To Organize a Majority PAC	Leadership PAC	Health Professionals; Hospitals/Nursing Homes; Health Services/HMOs	10,000
5	United Food & Commercial Workers Union	Labor Union, PAC	Prescription Drug Debate	10,000
6	Treasure State PAC	Leadership PAC	Pharmaceutical/Health Products; Health Professionals	9,999
8	University of California	Individual	Health Issues; Medicare & Medicaid; Medical Research & Clinical Laboratories	7,350
7	Great Plains Leadership Fund	Leadership PAC	Health Professionals	7,000
	Blank Rome LLP	PAC, Lobbying Firm, Individual	All Health Issues	6,050
9	Alaska Heart Institute	Individual	Health Professionals	5,500
10	American College of Emergency Physicians	PAC, Lobbying firm	Health Professionals	5,000
10	American College of Radiology	PAC, Lobbying firm	Health Professionals	5,000

<b>Ranking</b>	<b>Contributor</b>	<b>Contributor Type</b>	<b>Health Sector and/ or Other Health Issue Interest</b>	<b>Total \$</b>
10	Amgen Inc	PAC, Lobbying Firm	Pharmaceutical/Health Products	5,000
10	Communications Workers of America	Labor Union, PAC	Health Benefits; Prescription Drug Coverage	5,000
10	Glacier PAC	Leadership PAC	Health Professionals; Health Services/HMOs; Pharmaceutical/Health Products	5,000
10	Ironworkers Union	Labor Union, PAC	Health Care Reform	5,000
10	Laborers Union	Labor Union, PAC	Health Care Reform	5,000
10	M-PAC	Leadership PAC	Health Professionals; Pharmaceutical/Health Products	5,000
10	National Association of Health Underwriters	PAC, Lobbying Firm	Health Insurance; All Health Issues	5,000
10	National Association of Realtors	PAC	Health Care Reform	5,000
10	National Association of Insurance & Financial Advisors	PAC	Health Insurance	5,000
10	New York Life Insurance	PAC, Lobbying Firm	Health Insurance	5,000
10	PAC to the Future	Leadership PAC	Health Professionals; Pharmaceutical/Health Products	5,000
10	UnitedHealth Group	PAC, Lobbying Firm	Health Services/HMOs	5,000

SOURCE: [OpenSecrets.org](http://OpenSecrets.org) [14]

## **Comments**

Since his election in 2008, Senator Begich has received a total of \$115,733 in health sector contributions from the four health sector industries (not including other health interest contributions). The Alaska Heart Institute, the American College of Emergency Physicians, and the American College of Radiology represent three of the health sector contributors from the health professionals industry. Patton Boggs, LLP and the labor unions AFSCME and AFL-CIO, represent the top three contributors to Begich who are not directly affiliated with the health sector, but list 'All Health Issues' as their interests.

## **Final Observations: Health Sector Contributions to the Alaska Congressional Delegation**

The purpose of this study was to assess contributions from the Health Sector (including indirect health sector contributors), and to show sources of information to track the flow of contributions to members of Congress. Alaska's Senatorial members of Congress hold different Committee positions, which ultimately influence the flow of their donations. The members of the Health, Education, Labor, and Pension (HELP) and Finance Committees appear to be the main targets for health contributors. Murkowski is the only legislator from Alaska who is a member of the HELP Committee, and the contributions she received following that appointment show a general increase from the health sector.

Although members of certain committees are the main targets for health sector and/or health interest contributors, all members of Congress have health sector contributions. Blank Rome LLP, Laborers Union, AFL-CIO, Conoco Philips and Patton Boggs LLP are among the top health interest contributors for all members of Congress from Alaska. All of these contributors are not health sector contributors exclusively, because they have broader interests. Amgen Inc., a lobbying firm representing the pharmaceutical/health products industry, contributed to both Senators Begich and Lisa Murkowski. Patton Boggs LLP is one of the top health interest contributors for both senators, for all cycles.

The connection between health industry contributions and voting behavior is suggestive. A recent study tracking the health reform legislation voting of all members of Congress found that opponents of the House Health Reform Bill (narrowly passed on November 7, 2009), received, on average, fifteen percent more in donations from the health industry than those who supported the bill. Specifically, those that voted against the bill had received an average of \$ 502,650 from the health industry, since 1989, versus \$437,100 received by supporters [22]. As Congress continues to consider and vote on health reform legislation, the flow of large amounts of money from health sector industries and interests to our elected representatives requires careful scrutiny.

## **Project Methodology**

This project tracked the health sector contributions received by Alaska's Congressional Senators, as well as from other industries citing an interest in health issues and healthcare. Data on Senators Murkowski and Begich were taken from the Center for Responsible Politics (CRP).

The Center for Responsive Politics on United States members of Congress. Reports, data, and findings are published and available on their main website on [opensecrets.org](http://opensecrets.org). The CRP compiles data from different sources, including the Federal Election Committee on the campaign contributions of Members of Congress. The CRP uses multiple resources, which include Congress's official website (i.e. Thomas), to collect data on politicians, industries, lobbying, contribution trends, among others [3].

Data were analyzed to create member- and sector-specific reports for Senators Murkowski and Begich. Specifically, data on contributions were reviewed by industry, election cycle, and amount. Health sector contributions were determined using the four subcategories of the health Sector outlined by the CRP:

- Health Professionals,
- Hospitals and Nursing Homes,
- Health Services/HMOs, and
- Pharmaceuticals/Health Products [5].

When applicable, trends in health sector contributions, committee assignments, and industries are reported.

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