



A Dunn Deal?

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Empowered Senators Slash Texas Ethics Agency's Budget

Empower Texans Wields Political Protection Money As Ethics Cops Crack Down on Dark-Money Group

Texas Ethics Commissioners have been fighting since 2012 to force Empower Texans chief Michael Q. Sullivan to register as a lobbyist and to compel Texas' largest dark-money group to disclose contributors. Represented by attorney "[Moldy Joe Nixon](#)," Empower's only legal victories so far have been delay tactics. Empower has enjoyed more success buying influence in the Texas Senate, which recently proposed slashing the Ethics Commission budget by 37 percent.

Arguing that the budget just cut reflects the innocuous end of a one-time agency computer expense, Senate Finance Chair Jane Nelson said she was "ticked off" at suggestions that Empower ordered the Ethics cuts as retribution.¹ With rumors that Empower ordered a Senate Ethics

hit persisting, *Lobby Watch* investigates what might underlie such concerns.

Empower operates a transparent PAC, while the Empower non-profit corporation is unrivalled in Texas for its independent expenditures of un-sourced, dark money. Midland oilman Tim Dunn, who longs for the days when his [hardline homeboy Tom Craddick](#) ran the Texas House, founded Empower. Empower, which is best known for attacking relatively moderate House Republicans to overthrow Speaker Joe Straus, also has been quietly buying up Senate equity.

Empower PAC is new Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick's biggest donor. Empower PAC and Dunn gave Patrick almost \$1.3 million, or 6 percent of the money that Patrick has raised since Empower launched its PAC in 2007.

Empower Texans PAC's Top Recipients

Amount	Recipient (10/07-10/22/14)
\$1,236,100	Dan Patrick
\$504,570	Ken Paxton
\$163,949	Jonathan Stickland
\$159,500	Matt Schaefer
\$92,219	Ken Legler
\$87,750	Konni L. Burton
\$80,000	Don Huffines

Tim Dunn's Top Recipients

Amount	Recipient (10/07-10/22/14)
\$4,360,500	Empower Texans PAC
\$100,000	Konni L. Burton
\$54,046	Dan Patrick
\$45,000	Matthew S. Beebe
\$20,000	Ryan Sitton
\$15,000	Don Willett
\$14,128	Scott Turner

Tim Dunn is the No. 2 contributor to Senator Konni Burton, who took 9 percent of her money from Dunn and Empower. And Empower PAC is the No. 2 contributor to Senators Don Huffines and Bob Hall, with Empower supplying an impressive 11 percent of Hall's cash.

Empower's non-profit corporation has made almost \$900,000 in dark-money independent political expenditures since 2012. Its dark money is harder to track, by definition. While the *source* of these funds is completely black, for now the beleaguered Ethics Commission mandates disclosures of dark-money *expenditures*.

Empower's non-profit has itemized spending \$186,892 in dark money directly on behalf of five current senators. Empower spent \$157,854 promoting Sen. Charles Perry. Empower's dark-money expenditures also include \$11,419 for Sen. Don Huffines, \$8,653 for Sen. Kelly Hancock,

\$5,894 for Sen. Donna Campbell and \$3,072 for Sen. Konni Burton. In addition, Empower reported spending \$11,943 promoting the *opponents* of Senators Brandon Creighton and Kel Seliger.

Nor is this all. Empower often reports spending a lump sum on behalf of a slew of candidates. The last column of the table below identifies six senators who each have benefitted from dozens of mass expenditures of Empower's dark money.

Reading like a pulp-fiction script, the No. 1 contributor to the Texas Attorney General is a shadowy group that's fighting ethics charges in state court. Empower's PAC gave more than \$500,000 to Ken Paxton. Despite [Utah's cautionary tale](#) about secretly funded attorneys general, Empower's non-profit spent another \$10,000 in *dark money* last year promoting Paxton to be Texas' top lawyer.²

Empower Texans (ET) Spending on Current Senate (10/07 to 10/22/14)

Empower PAC Amount	Tim Dunn (TD) Amount	Total Raised	Dunn + ET PAC (%)	Donor Ranks ET - TD	Senate Member	ET Dark Money Expend.	No. ET Group Dark Money Expend.
\$1,236,100	\$54,046	\$20,438,383	6%	1 - 70	Dan Patrick	\$0	0
\$87,750	\$100,000	\$2,167,634	9%	6 - 2	Konni L. Burton	\$3,072	33
\$80,000	\$0	\$1,180,940	7%	2 - 0	Don Huffines	\$11,419	47
\$54,044	\$0	\$1,246,965	4%	4 - 0	*Charles Perry	\$157,854	46
\$50,091	\$0	\$464,996	11%	2 - 0	Bob Hall	\$0	47
\$20,235	\$0	\$1,118,382	2%	8 - 0	*Brian Birdwell	\$0	0
\$7,000	\$0	\$2,607,630	<1%	50 - 0	*Donna Campbell	\$5,894	1
\$3,000	\$0	\$2,533,957	<1%	188 - 0	Craig Estes	\$0	0
\$0	\$0				*Kelly Hancock	\$8,653	0
\$0	\$0				Paul Bettencourt	\$0	33
\$0	\$0				Van Taylor	\$0	33
\$1,538,220	\$154,046	\$31,758,887	5%		TOTALS	\$186,892	240

* Patrick-appointed Senate Committee chair.

Note: "Total Raised" excludes internal transfers by candidates controlling more than one committee.

Notes

¹ "Ethics Commission Facing Cuts," *Austin American-Statesman*, January 29, 2015.

² Empower also reported 39 mass expenditures of dark money promoting Paxton.