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## SPEAKERS

Nicole Cox, Zac Ziegler, Mike Noble, Terry Goddard, Christopher Conover

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Christopher Conover 00:03

Welcome to The Buzz. I'm Christopher Conover. This week, where political campaigns get their money. The cost of running for office in the US continues to go up. High profile contest can range from millions for a seat in the US House of Representatives to hundreds of millions for the presidency. So where does all of that money come from? Mostly donations from supporters of the candidate be they voters or outside groups. And those donations are disclosed regularly in campaign finance reports. To start this week's episode, we spoke with Mike Noble, he is a pollster with Noble Predictive Insights, he starts by answering how closely the dollars in a campaign match public opinion of a candidate.



Mike Noble 00:55

You know, there's certain what I call like key performance indicators, just like you haven't in corporate life. And what we find is that, you know, polling is a great measurement. As a nationally recognized pollster, you know, I'm obviously a huge fan of polling. But I personally think the more you can have an understanding of the overall view of the playing field, because polling tells you what people's sentiment is. Well, the next key indicator is also cash or campaign finance. And why it's important is because, what are the resources? So for example, like, let's say, Chris, you and I were hypothetically going against each other in a political election. I'm up 10 points in the polls, whatever, right. But you look at the campaign finance, and I raise some money, but I got no cash available, like I got no gas in the tank, when especially in the last 30 days of the election, when folks are most paying attention. If I go dark in those last 30 days, because I don't have the resources, I'm probably gonna end up losing that race, it's important to know these indicators. And I guess to bring it all back to is money end all be all. It's not. It used to be someone had more money, it was like 90% of the time person with more money would win. But that was before the technology developments like these different modes, or mediums of communication. I mean, it looks nothing like what it was 10 years ago,



Christopher Conover 02:07



Christopher Conover 02:07

When it comes to money and polling and awareness. You mentioned ads, especially the last 30 days, you know, you're up on TV, yard signs, but do discussions like this, where reporters sit around and we talk about oh, so and so has a lot of money, and so and so is burning through it more quickly. Does any of this stuff play into that?



Mike Noble 02:31

Yeah, no, it does. So when you look at campaigns and how that impacted the money aspect is that well, first rule in politics is that perception is reality when it comes to campaigning. Campaigns are all about showing of strength momentum, like when you see folks cut rolling out these different coalitions and things like that, they don't really have a really material impact. But what they do is show this momentum, because that's what running for office is basically a short term marketing campaign. The only thing is we have a guaranteed end date. So when you're running that campaign, it's just it's important to be cognizant of the resources. For example, the GOP primary for US Senate to take on Mark. Kelly, when he was running, he had Kelli Ward, Martha McSally and Joe Arpaio, it was interesting is that McSally, kind of more moderate McCain type, you know, Ward more like Trump MAGA type, and then Arpaio is just Arpaio. And so



Christopher Conover 03:23

He's just Joe Arpaio, right?



Mike Noble 03:24

[laughs] Yeah, he's Joe, I'll leave it at that. And so when you look at that, it was funny that McSally was up, but you notice Ward was steadily gaining. When you looked at her campaign finance reports, it was telling because you could see the trend. She was spending the money basically, as she was getting it. What you saw was that she was gaining ground, but she was gaining ground because she was spending money where McSally was holding onto her cash because she knew voters weren't paying attention maybe as much. But she was kind of keeping her powder dry, and then they got her to being competitive. But the problem was is that ran a gas and then McSally basically unleashed and absolutely ended up crushing her. And ended up winning the race by 20 points. Remember, it's a campaign. It's not who's most qualified, etc. It's who wins a popularity contest, right? Campaigning, there's a science to it. I've seen it time and time again, where folks, where the one who's absolutely more qualified gets absolutely shellacked.



Christopher Conover 04:16

And we've seen that plenty of times. And you're right. Sometimes those fundamentals also come down to not only how much money you've raised, but when you decide to spend it, and where you decide to spend it.



M

Mike Noble 04:28

Right because you typically see a trend is that so one of the key indicators you look at so if you've ever bored on a Friday, Saturday evening, you want to go look at campaign finance reports,

C

Christopher Conover 04:36

Sadly, we do that here. But yeah.

M

Mike Noble 04:39

[laughs] You know, more people should. One of the indicators look at is not because a lot of people say oh, so and so raise a million dollars or \$3 million, etc. And that shows, you know, support. Think of it as like investors, like if I had a startup. So there's one point there but the other part is like how much cash do they have? Because at the beginning of campaign you have startup costs just like any organization, right? But then do those costs stay pretty high, or do you usually have a lot of costs and then usually kind of keep things super lean. And then to kind of use the rest of them the last three months of the race.



05:08

when

C

Christopher Conover 05:08

When it comes to campaign finance, one of the things we're looking at in this show, and a lot of people look at, we'll take the US Senate race that's going on right now, money coming in from out of state. When voters hear oh, Candidate A is getting all this money from out of state, does that reflect in the polls? Do people say, Oh, well, wait a minute, who is this person? Or is that just considered part of the game and nobody cares?

M

Mike Noble 05:37

I think it's kind of more considered part of the game, because I think the average voter, it's harder to disseminate. But they know like the outside groups, because the kind of current campaign structure or at least modern day politics, especially since McCain Feingold ruling on campaign finance, you basically have the campaigns, they will run full positive messaging. And then the outside groups basically are the attack dogs. And what we found is that where it does impact polling, let's say you and I are hypothetically going against each other. And I say, you know, Chris is bad. He's terrible. This and the other, the thing is that when you do the attacks, yes, I'll damage you a little bit. But I'll actually lose more. And you think that oh, you would gain especially if other candidates in the race. So that's why you have the outside groups doing it because voters don't really connect the Campaign Committee to the outside because it just it's just so prevalent in there because you look at Republicans and Democrats and US Senate is a

good example you provided because a crapload of money goes into those. The only thing bigger than that is president. But like the Senate blows out of the water, the spend compared to like congressional races. And so the vast majority, the funds on both sides of the aisle are coming frankly, from out of state like there's not a lot of money, frankly, here the desert unlike, you know, states like Virginia, for example. I talked consultants over there, and they say, hey, just to be competitive, just to throw your hat in the ring for a state legislative seat, you got to have a million dollars at least. And here, I've never seen a Legislative candidate A with a billion dollars ever let alone like if you had like \$250,000 That's like our version of a million bucks.

**C** Christopher Conover 07:05

You and I have talked to US Senate races, because we have them every two years. Currently, it seems.

**M** Mike Noble 07:11

[laughs] Yup, our fifth US Senate seats in a row

**C** Christopher Conover 07:14

Each time they get more and more expensive. Will this US Senate race probably be an absolute record setter when it comes to money?

**M** Mike Noble 07:23

It's gonna be close. The only reason why is that Mark Kelly, he's the best fundraiser I've ever seen in Arizona. That dude was a money machine. He was, I think, at one point ranked the most prolific fundraiser in the country of all US Senate, not only challengers, but then I think even among incumbents, outside of maybe like leadership. But Ruben, you know, I think he's on a good pace. But what you're seeing is right now this dynamic we've seen play out the last three election cycles. When it comes to US Senate spending, there's a massive imbalance between the sheer amount of money Democrats have and how much less of it Republicans have. Last cycle, the top 10 senate races, Republicans were literally outspent significantly in some of those races. I mean, they were more efficient. The Republicans cost per vote was great. The thing is that they just had a lot more tonnage. And so the US Senate races and we're seeing the same trend, like look at Reuben. He raised what just last quarter, seven some million? Kerri Lake raised two and a half, three, which is good, but it never hurts to have more money, you know, to buy more billboards and do more direct messaging, you know, all of this stuff that you do. I think Democrats have an innate advantage, especially on the US Senate level that Republicans are still trying to catch up on frankly.

**C** Christopher Conover 08:39

That was Mike Noble of Noble Predictive Insights. Joining me now to talk about what's in campaign finance reports for two races that will top the ballot in November is The Buzz producer Zoo Zierler

producer Zac Ziegler.

Z

Zac Ziegler 08:53

Thanks for having me, Chris. Always good to be on the other side of the microphone. Well,

C

Christopher Conover 08:57

Well, it is a rarity. But it is nice to have you on this side of the mic and this side of the glass. And for our listeners, they're going to get a little secret you and I love Big Data. And when it comes to campaign finance, that's big data. So before we talk about what we found in the FEC data, let me set this up for our listeners just so they understand. Individuals, people like you, me and all of our listeners, can give \$3,300 to a federal candidate this year, and last year, per election, and that means \$3,300 in the primary and then \$3,300 again for the general election. Zac, we looked at for the purposes of this, the federal elections, presidential and US Senate. Let's start with presidential. I looked specifically at donors in Arizona for President Biden and former President Trump for the first quarter of this year. And you looked at the full year. The first thing of note, when we looked at zip codes, who's giving to these candidates from Arizona, there's a lot of overlap.

Z

Zac Ziegler 10:18

Yeah. And we opened up my searches to the whole time that people had been running for president in 2024. So that we could include Nikki Haley a little more easily get a bigger sample of her numbers. We also included the independent Robert F. Kennedy Jr. in those numbers. One really interesting thing was all four of them had two zip codes in their top three for giving. They're Scottsdale area zip codes 85253 and 85255. After that, things got a little different for everyone. But very interesting that those two were first, second or third for everyone.

C

Christopher Conover 10:57

And I know for President Trump in the first quarter, because that's what I was really looking at. That zip code up near Lake Pleasant in Phoenix was his big donation area. For the first quarter, I believe on your notes, it was the number two for him for the whole election cycle. And then down here in Pima County, for President Biden, it was foothills area 85718. That was number two in the first quarter.

Z

Zac Ziegler 11:34

Yeah, so how about let's hop over to another topic, we talked about big dollars. Let's talk about the big donors. President Biden has been doing quite well there amongst Arizonans. He's had 53 people give him \$6000+ making up about \$350,000. We can compare that to former President Trump, who had one such donor, it's name we may all recognize Blake Masters.



**C** Christopher Conover 12:05

Who's running for Congress, again, ran for US Senate two years ago. And again, all of these numbers for our listeners are just what's happening in Arizona.

**Z** Zac Ziegler 12:15

Yes.

**C** Christopher Conover 12:16

And President Trump, interestingly, had a lot of small dollar donors, you and I noticed one individual who has given hundreds and hundreds of donations, and some of them as small as a penny to President Trump.

**Z** Zac Ziegler 12:35

Yeah, and that seemed to be something that happened a lot with his campaign he had 62,000 donations in Arizona, about 1300 of those were for a penny. And if you upped that to a nickel or less, that was about 3300 donors. By comparison, President Biden, we're talking about 9000 donations with only about 10 of them being \$1 or less. For Nikki Haley, we saw about 18,000 donations, about 500 of \$1 or less, and for Robert F. Kennedy Jr. about 2700 donations and he had one donation of \$1. Everything else was larger than that.

**C** Christopher Conover 13:16

Those are some of the high points for what presidential candidates have pulled in from Arizona. Now we head to the race for an open US Senate seat in the state.

**Z** Zac Ziegler 13:25

Well, that race still has three notable competitors. Democratic Congressman Ruben Gallego has his party's nomination all but sewn up. If we head to the Republican side, former news anchor Kari Lake is seen as the front runner, but Pinal County Sheriff Mark Lamb isn't letting her get away that easily. We also pulled down some data from independent incumbent Kyrsten Sinema, who dropped out of the race early last month.

**C** Christopher Conover 13:53

let's start with a topic we heard about from Mike Noble earlier, out of state donations. Zac, this is something we both looked at in our research, you did the numbers and I did the maps. So give our audience the basics or basics with the details about what we found.



Z Zac Ziegler 14:10

At this point Mark Lamb who is the candidate with the lesser amount of money, he has the largest amount of his money coming from within Arizona, a little over 70% That's followed by Kari Lake about 44% of her money comes from within the state. Kyrsten Sinema had about 28% of her money and Ruben Gallego about 22% from within the state. And Gallego ,he's received about a million dollars from people donating from within the state. By comparison, if you're wondering where that money's coming from outside of Arizona, he had about \$900,000 from California and \$400,000 from New York state

C Christopher Conover 14:53

And taking a look at Kari Lake. She got about 1.1 million from Arizona and about 250,000 from California and Texas. And Mark Lamb pulled from Texas but not too much, about \$8,800.

Z Zac Ziegler 15:10

Yeah and Kyrsten Sinema, the DC area what she received from there was about equal to what she was receiving in Arizona contributions before she dropped out. But of note, as we mentioned, Sinema and Lamb their their donations both gets small enough that one max donor can really throw things. For an example here. Sinema's next state on her list was Nebraska. And that's because she had one max donor there. And

C Christopher Conover 15:40

And who was that? It's of note.

Z Zac Ziegler 15:43

Yeah, that was the governor of Nebraska's wife.

C Christopher Conover 15:46

One of the other things we looked at, again, something we spoke with Mike Noble about were events and fundraising. For Senate candidates, one of the big events was Kari Lake's feud with Jeff Dewitt. He was at the time the head of the Arizona Republican party. He eventually resigned. As that came to a head on January 23 and 24th Kari Lake had big fundraising days. On the 24th of January she raised \$34,000. The day before in comparison \$13,000.

Z Zac Ziegler 16:22

Yeah, and another big week for Lake. She raised more than \$600,000 within a week of declining to defend against a defamation lawsuit filed by Maricopa County Recorder Stephen Richer.

**C** Christopher Conover 16:36

For Democrat Ruben Gallego, his big days were March 5 and 6. That's when Kyrsten Sinema announced she wasn't running, and Senator Mark Kelly endorsed him. On March 5, he picked up \$254,000. The next day, almost \$331,000.

**Z** Zac Ziegler 16:56

And as we looked at the data, we really didn't see dates that stood out for Sinema, or Lamb as far as being notably higher than others. Although interestingly, the day that Kyrsten Sinema dropped out of the race she received \$12,000 in donations. Thanks,

**C** Christopher Conover 17:12

Thanks, Zach. And you and I'll be back after we dive into the data again next week. When we look at how candidates spend all the money. And for our listeners, make sure to go to the website. We have maps broken down by ZIP codes and all kinds of charts about all the things we've been talking about. So you as our listeners can see what we did and join us in the fun that is data,

**Z** Zac Ziegler 17:36

Any excuse to build an overly elaborate spreadsheet. So I'll see you then Chris.

**C** Christopher Conover 17:42


Arizona is in its first election cycle where a new voter approved law about campaign finance is in effect. It requires groups that have no formal association with a candidate to disclose their largest donors publicly. To learn about how that law might affect our upcoming election, I spoke with former Arizona Attorney General Terry Goddard, who organized the effort around the new dark money law. He starts by giving us a status update of the law, which has been the subject of several legal challenges.

**T** Terry Goddard 18:17


We're in business. I guess that's the critical thing to say is that ever since the election was certified on December 5, 2022, the statute that the voters approved by 72% is the law in Arizona. There were challenges and a lot of people got confused, because as soon as they read there was a challenge. they assumed that there have been an injunction. But there wasn't None of the courts have given any consideration of granting an injunction. So we had the challenges everyone has been now resolved in trial court favorably to the voters opinion about having better transparency. So I'm very pleased with that.






 Christopher Conover 19:00

As we really start ramping up this election season for people who maybe voted for this or maybe didn't vote for it when it was up. What does all this mean, as we really get into election season now that it's an effect?

 Terry Goddard 19:14

Well, it means that it is a fairly limited group that it affects and that is if you're a major donor to what used to be considered dark money organizations, in other words, 501c4 advocacy nonprofits whose business is to hide the identity of the contributors. If you were one of those and you give over \$5,000 You now have to be disclosed. And the other sort of operative word is you've got to be the original donor. So what we found a lot of was people would, it was a literally a daisy chain of contributions. I give to you, you give to somebody else, they give to a third party, all with funny names like Citizens for Peanut Butter and eventually if we get spent for political advertising. What Prop 211 has done is it says, Look, you can do that that's not illegal. But you got to tell us where the original source was.


 20:11  
Now

 Christopher Conover 20:11

Now I know as a reporter, I'm not allowed to publicly get behind groups, but I could get behind Citizens for Peanut Butter, because it is a major staple of my diet. But if I wanted to find out who that is, do these groups have to report just like all the other candidates and groups that report in the state? Or do they report somewhere special, if I'm a member of the public and want to go see who's behind Citizens for Peanut Butter, it's

 Terry Goddard 20:39

It's at the Secretary of State's website, the organization that has to do the reporting is the one that spends the money. So if I'm X,Y and Z, advocacy nonprofit, and I spend \$100,000 for Candidate Z, and several of my contributors were over \$5,000, then I've got to tell the state, the Secretary of State within five days who they were. Failing that I can't spend the money without getting fired.

 Christopher Conover 21:11

The natural place will see a lot of this as the various ballot initiatives coming in, especially this year, it looks like we're going to have a lot of them. Will this law pertain to federal candidates? Be they congressional or our very high profile US Senate race? Well,

 T 21:00

Terry Goddard 21:28

Well, I would love to have said yes, but no state law can't apply to federal candidates. They're, they're governed by something called the Federal Elections Commission.

C Christopher Conover 21:38

Now, I know having talked to you over the years, this is obviously something you've been passionate about for years. The late, Senator McCain put in a number or tried to put in a number of restrictions, McCain Feingold being one of the better known ones. What do you hear on on the national level? Is something like this ever going to come along for presidential, congressional, US Senate candidates or is this just gonna stay at the states?

T Terry Goddard 22:07

That's a great question and a hard one to answer. I hope it eventually is a federal law. We've been in contact with some of the senators. So Whitehouse in particular, Senator Whitehouse from Delaware is . . . or Rhode Island, excuse me, is a strong proponent of full disclosure, and has been very upfront about it. The DISCLOSE Act has been pending, it was passed by the House, the beginning of this current administration, but it's been stalled in the Senate, largely because Mitch McConnell hates transparency. It's a challenge, and here's the challenge, I find that citizens are overwhelmingly in favor. In fact, I can't get a single person when I was passing petitions to say, you know, I'd rather not know who's paying for the ads that I'm watching. The general population is over here, and many of the elected representatives, especially here in Arizona, are in completely other side. You know, Prop 211, passed by 72%. And frankly, I think it was even more popular than that, because our polling all showed us in the high 80s. There was a little confusion, I know with the way it was phrased on the ballot, the way the wording was. And I think we lost maybe 10% because of that. So think about this. Here's something that 90% of Arizonans think should be the law and support, and the legislature would never give it a hearing. So the only thing I draw from that is that there are certain politicians who are either beholden to dark money, or would like to be in the future, are afraid to death of the dark money forces are going to primary them and knock them out of their office. Unfortunately, what was true in the Arizona legislature is probably true in Congress as well. I'm not as not as up to speed about that. But I think some of the same fears exist, and it's a bipartisan fear.

C Christopher Conover 23:51

So it's campaign finance time, at least on the federal level, the state is following along. I don't know if you've looked at any of the reports, have there been any surprises you've seen? If you have looked like Oh, is that where that money is coming from?

T Terry Goddard 24:07

Well, there haven't been yet because many times we had a pretty good suspicion as to what was happening. We just didn't have proof. Now we know who it is that spending and and we'll be able to evaluate the message in terms of the messenger, of who's paying for the ads to be

placed. I expect some surprises. We're still relatively early in the in the campaign contributions season. I expect the heavy expenditures will hit us sometime around primary election day

**C** Christopher Conover 24:38  
Coming to our TVs soon.

**T** Terry Goddard 24:40  
Yeah, right. I mean, there's several levels that this will be involving. It's not just the disclosure of the Secretary of State, there's an on-air disclosure requirement. I mean, I don't expect blockbuster revelations. But here's the thing, back in 2014 when we had a statewide election for two corporation commissioners, our friendly neighborhood utility here in Phoenix appeared to be involved, although they would never admit it. They basically said along the lines of we can either confirm or deny that APS is involved in these campaigns. But they never confirmed that they in fact, were paying as it turned out later, five years later, we found out \$10 million was spent to promote those two candidates and they got elected, and then they voted very favorably for rate increases. No laws were broken, but the fact that would be different under this situation was, you would have to say on the ad that it was brought to you by contributions from the utility that's being regulated by the people that are seeking election. I think that would have an impact. And I think now at least you will know for sure who it is that's spending those checks.

**C** Christopher Conover 25:51  
All right, we will find out thanks for spending some time with us

**T** Terry Goddard 25:54  
Thank you.

**C** Christopher Conover 25:55  
That was Terry Goddard organizer of the Outlaw Dark Money campaign. And that's The Buzz for this week. Tune in next week as we look at how the money donated to campaigns is spent. You can find all our episodes online at [azpm.org](http://azpm.org) and subscribe to our show wherever you get your podcasts, just search for The Buzz Arizona. We're also on the NPR app. Zac Ziegler is our producer with production help from Deserae Tucker. Our music is by Enter the Haggis, I'm Christopher Conover. Thanks for listening.

**N** Nicole Cox 26:45  
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