

SWEETS FOR THE SWEET - HOW THE SUGAR INDUSTRY PROTECTS ITSELF

Two farmers face off in a race for Congress, trying to join the sixteen farmers currently in the House. They wage a tough campaign, focusing on issues such as water and the economy. The Democrat tells the sugar industry he will fight agreements with developing countries to allow them to sell their sugar in the U.S. He receives donations from eight political action committees in the sugar industry. He is now seventeen points ahead in the polls.¹

The U.S. sugar industry gave more than \$3.3 million to political parties in 2000 alone.² Jerry Huckaby, the former Louisiana Congressman called “Mr. Sugar,” has made no bones about the impact those contributions can have, calling it a “reward in advance” for voting the ‘right’ way.³ The Florida Sugar Cane League spends ninety percent of its average \$80,000 annually on candidates in Florida - trying to protect the sugar farmers who are destroying the Everglades wetlands.⁴

Over \$2 million in campaign contributions, more than \$600,000 in the 2004 cycle alone, has come from the American Crystal Sugar PAC, operated by a single sugar producer.⁵ Since 1991, an additional half million dollars has come in through “soft money” contributions directly from individuals in the sugar industry. Since 1979, sugar related interests have spent almost \$12 million in campaign contributions, \$11.2 million of which went to congressional candidates.⁶ Current members of the agriculture committees of the House and Senate have taken nearly half a million dollars from the sugar PACs.

The power of the sugar industry’s purse reaches beyond Congress, influencing presidential politics as well. The president of American Crystal Sugar has said he will not give to the Bush campaign in 2004 as he did in 2000, because the Central American Free Trade Agreement Bush negotiated may open sugar markets.⁷ On the other side, Republican Senator Norm Coleman of Minnesota, campaigning for Bush, says Kerry has a lousy record on sugar, having voted against subsidies. Republicans from Minnesota to Louisiana admit they will lose too many votes if Bush doesn’t get the sugar provisions out of the Central American agreement, and will have to vote against it or risk losing their seats.⁸

The sugar industry is unashamed of its purchasing power. “The U.S. sugar program is the most efficient tax we have,” said James Kempner, CEO of Imperial Sugar, “It comes directly from consumers and goes directly to the growers, who turn around and give some of the money to the politicians. It never goes through Washington at all.”⁹

The sugar producers haven’t stopped. As of September 21, 2004, their PACs have given \$1.7 million in contributions to the November campaign.¹⁰

¹ “Sugar Industry Sweet on Salazar in House Race,” CBS 4 Denver, news4colorado.com, September 13, 2004.

² Center for Responsive Politics, “Crop Production & Basic Processing: Background,” www.opensecrets.org/industries/background.asp?Ind=A01 (last visited September 3, 2004).

³ Center for Responsive Politics, “The Politics of Sugar,” www.opensecrets.org/pubs/casingin_sugar/sugar03.html (last visited September 21, 2004).

⁴ Id.

⁵ Id.

⁶ Id.

⁷ Rob Hotakainen, “Sugar Industry Sours on Bush,” *The Sacramento Bee*, September 3, 2004.

⁸ Hotakainen.

⁹ “Sticky Situation,” *Forbes.com*, May 14, 2001, available at www.forbes.com/forbes.2001/0514/064.html.

¹⁰ <http://www.campaignmoney.com/finance.asp?type=pn&cycle=04&criteria=Sugar>