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Continued from 1A

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Buttenwieser (BUTTON-weezer) says his primary motivation is electing progressive Democrats to office and leaving them to govern as they see fit. Half a dozen associates back him up. They say he just wants to elect people who think the way he does.

"He is doing it for the reasons you read about in civics books," says Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle, D-S.D., one of Buttenwieser's best friends in Washington. "It's so refreshing to know somebody like that."

Cover story

In separate interviews, three friends use the same words to describe his motives: "He's in it for all the right reasons."

In Washington, when political donors say their contributions are intended only to promote "good government," they often do so with a wink and a grin. For lobbyists and other major donors, giving and raising campaign money are as natural as breathing. It is how they make themselves indispensable to those in power. It is how they ensure a spot at the front of the line when they need an appointment with a policymaker or an urgent phone call returned. It is what they do for a living.

However, though self-interest in political giving dominates public perceptions, political scientists and donors themselves say other motives are at least as common, particularly for the biggest contributors.

Among them:

▸ **Ideology**. "Most donors give because of what they believe in," says John Green, a political scientist at the University of Akron in Ohio who is co-author of a study on political donors. Corporations, unions and trade groups aside, "the larger the donations, the more ideological the donors tend to be. A lot of people don't believe that because we have this image of campaign contributors being venal."

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Buttenwieser grew up on Manhattan's upper east side, the son of parents whose marriage amounted to a merger between two major investment firms: Kuhn, Loeb & Co., and Lehman Brothers. There were two suitable professions, as far as his family was concerned: investment banking and law. Neither appealed to him, nor did the "stultifying, pressured society" in which his family lived.

Instead, he went away to college at Oberlin, in Ohio, dropped out briefly, lived with a friend in St. Louis and

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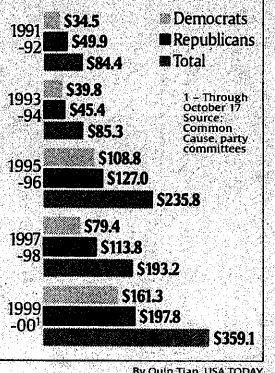
Law and regulatory changes in the late 1970s opened wide loopholes in the ban on political contributions from corporations and unions, and created a way around the limits on individual contributions that were established in the 1974 Federal Election Campaign Act. Since then, political parties' soft-money fundraising and spending has grown steadily. (Dollars in millions)



By Quin Tian, USA TODAY

Some of Buttenwieser's favored candidates, causes

Candidates and political committees Peter Buttenwieser has donated the most to since the beginning of 1999:

Democratic National Committee	$46
Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee	$60
Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee	$13
Pennsylvania Democratic Party (Senate campaign of Rep. Ron Klink)	$30
Michigan Democratic Party (Senate campaign of Rep. Debbie Stabenow)	$12
Missouri Democratic Party (Senate campaign of Gov. Mel Carnahan)	$10
Pennsylvania state House campaign committee	$6
Delaware Democratic Party (Senate campaign of Gov. Tom Carper)	$5
Florida Democratic Party (Senate campaign of Bill Nelson)	$2
Nebraska Democratic Party	$1
New Mexico Democratic Party	$1
Maine Democratic Party	$
Emily's List (a group that backs female Democratic candidates who support abortion rights)	$50

Source: Campaign Study Group, Buttenwieser personal records

to state parties, donors who want to do more can in effect evade the limits, knowing the party will use this "soft money" to boost their chosen candidate. Often, the request comes directly from the candidate, Buttenwieser says. Party experts show donors "how to do these things in a perfectly legal way," he says.

Buttenwieser, who declines to discuss his net worth, says he has no budget for political giving but does it "by feel," looking at each month's report from his investment advisers and judging what he can give. His decisions are not based on any litmus-test issues, although he tends to favor candidates who support abortion rights, gun control and public education.

"I just want a balanced, good, centrist, progressive agenda," he says.

Buttenwieser mostly shuns fundraising galas. He prefers instead to meet individually with candidates whom he supports. During the Democratic convention in Los Angeles, when many party givers were meeting with politicians and entertainers, wieser was at a Holiday Inn in Columbia, Mo. he was doing consulting work at two schools.

No state dinners

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Instead, he went away to college at Oberlin, in Ohio, dropped out briefly, lived with a friend in St. Louis and even worked parking cars. Later, he embraced education as a career, earning a doctorate at Columbia University in New York and working at an experimental inner-city school in Philadelphia.

In 1976, with his first marriage ending, he left the school system and became an education consultant. He remarried a decade later, eventually settling in Philadelphia's exclusive Chestnut Hills. He gave money occasionally to Democratic candidates, but no more than $500 or $1,000 at a time.

All that changed in 1991, when a prominent Philadelphia Democrat, David Fineman, invited him to a get-acquainted meeting with Ron Brown, who was chairman of the Democratic National Committee. Brown made a persuasive pitch: Buttenwieser's money could be harnessed to help Bill Clinton win the presidency and to promote the progressive political beliefs that he held dear.

A short time later, Buttenwieser visited Daschle for the first time at his Senate office. He found the South Dakotan "exceptional . . . genuinely warm and friendly." The two became friends, and with Daschle soon to become his party's Senate leader, Buttenwieser took a particular interest in helping Democrats running for the Senate.

Getting legal advice

Since then, Buttenwieser has contributed, by his reckoning, about $6.6 million to the Democratic Party and its candidates, making him the king of soft money.

A search of Federal Election Commission records turns up less than half that amount; the rest has flowed through state Democratic Party committees in large amounts intended to supplement the contributions he makes directly to candidates and the national party. Only one Democratic donor even comes close to Buttenwieser's giving in this two-year election cycle. He is S. Daniel Abraham, chairman of Slim-Fast Foods, who, according to FEC records, has given $1.2 million.

Under federal law, an individual donor can give no more than $1,000 to a candidate's campaign. By giving to state parties, donors who want to do more can in effect evade the limits, knowing the party will use this "soft money" to boost their chosen candidate. Often, the request comes directly from the candidate, Buttenwieser says. Party experts show donors "how to do these things in a perfectly legal way," he says.

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No state dinners

He has been invited to the vice president's mansion but has turned the invitations down, as he has declined opportunities to schmooze with top members of Congress at resorts from Nantucket, Mass., to Vail, Colo., or to attend state dinners at the White House or to fly aboard Air Force One.

"He has never said, 'Get me an appointment with the president,' " Daschle says. "I marvel at that a little bit because it's a very common request from friends."

Other common ways to lure wealthy donors include holding fundraisers at major sporting events for which tickets are difficult to get, such as the Super Bowl; golf outings and exclusive courses that promise hours of face time with top policymakers; and access to VIP receptions at the parties' presidential nominating conventions. Last year, donors who gave $100,000 to the Democratic House campaign committee were invited to a clambake at the Kennedy family compound in Hyannis Port, Mass.

The Clinton team took the practice to new — and, critics say, unsavory — heights in 1996 when it swapped White House access for donations. Coffees with the president and nights in the Lincoln Bedroom became the ultimate draw.

A sign of prosperity

Political giving reflects the nation's prosperity. This year has seen records fall: the most raised by a presidential candidate (Bush, $100 million); the most raised at a single event ($26.5 million at the Democratic gala May 24 in Washington); and the largest single campaign contribution ($1 million from the Service Employees International Union to the House Democratic campaign committee on June 5).

Political scientist Green says that even if donors' motives are pure, large contributions are anti-democratic. "If the big donors have the president's or Congress' ear, that means their point of view is getting more weight than yours or mine," he says.

Buttenwieser agrees. He says reforming campaign finance laws to limit the impact of big money in politics "would make me feel more comfortable and would attract more people back into politics and give them more faith in it."

In 1996, Buttenwieser says, Democratic fundraiser Terry McAuliffe offered him a lunch with President Clinton at the White House, around a table with just seven other donors, in exchange for a $50,000 gift to the party. He found the offer offensive and turned it down, complaining in a letter to McAuliffe that the request was an improper quid pro quo.

"I would not, under any circumstances, pay $50,000, or any stipulated amount, to break bread with President Clinton," he wrote. "It's not right." When the incident later became public, McAuliffe denied it and called Buttenwieser "a kook."

Buttenwieser shrugs off the name-calling.

"There is a code, like in the Mafia," he says. "You don't say anything against the system. You do what you want, but you never indicate that the system is a holdup system."

The soft touch

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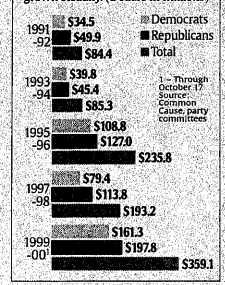

By Quin Tian, USA TODAY

Some of Buttenwieser's favored candidates, causes

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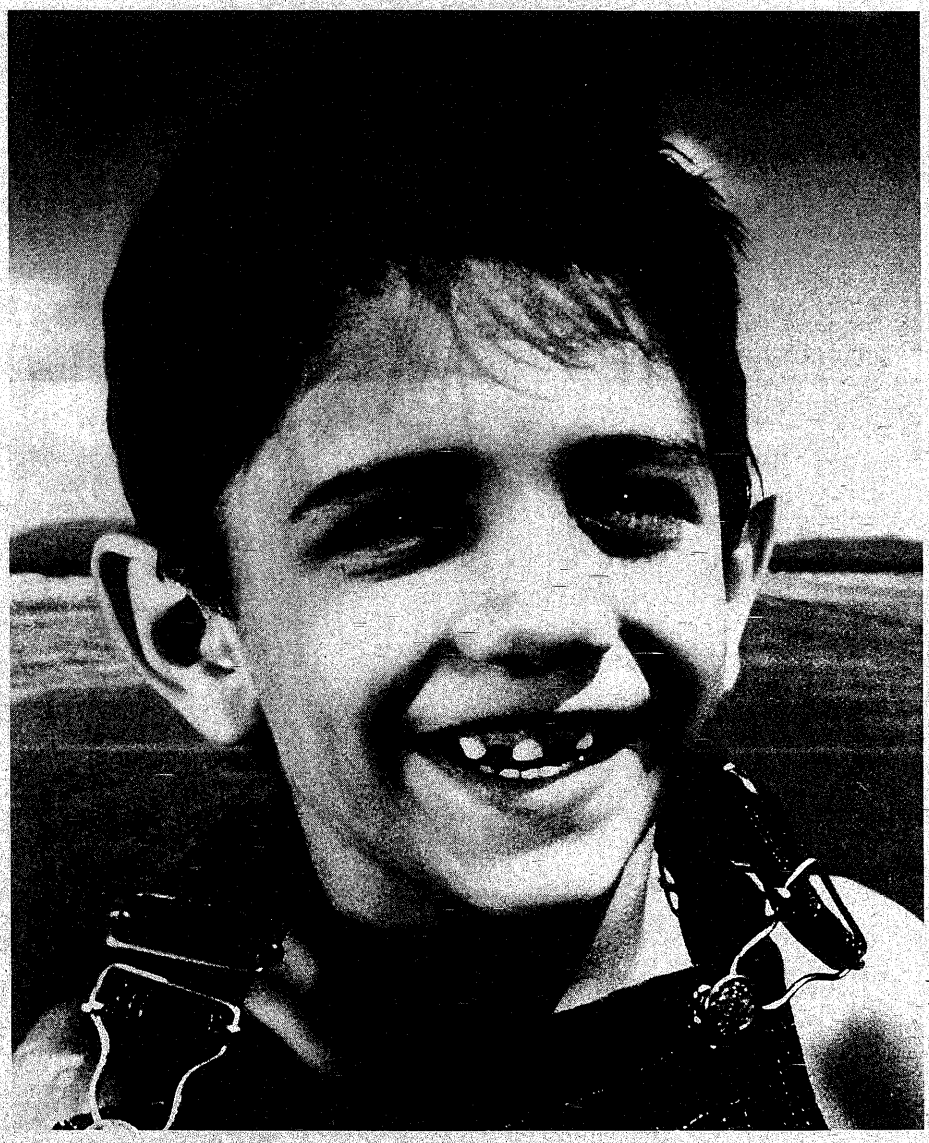
Democratic National Committee	$460,000
Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee	$600,000
Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee	$130,000
Pennsylvania Democratic Party (Senate campaign of Rep. Ron Klink)	$300,000
Michigan Democratic Party (Senate campaign of Rep. Debbie Stabenow)	$125,000
Missouri Democratic Party (Senate campaign of Gov. Mel Carnahan)	$100,000
Pennsylvania state House campaign committee	$60,000
Delaware Democratic Party (Senate campaign of Gov. Tom Carper)	$50,000
Florida Democratic Party (Senate campaign of Bill Nelson)	$25,000
Nebraska Democratic Party	$12,500
New Mexico Democratic Party	$12,500
Maine Democratic Party	$7,500
Emily's List (a group that backs female Democratic candidates who support abortion rights)	$500,000

Source: Campaign Study Group, Buttenwieser personal records



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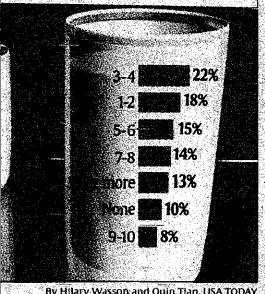

By Hilary Wasson and Quin Tian, USA TODAY

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Bush voters more energized as election nears

Poll shows Republicans more enthusiastic; Democrats count on final turnout push

By Jim Norman
USA TODAY

Republicans are more fired-up than Democrats about this year's presidential contest, a USA TODAY/CNN/Gallup Poll shows, a critical difference which GOP leaders hope will tip the balance in a razor-close election Nov. 7.

Among registered voters, 52% of Republicans say the vote this year matters more than it did in previous years, and 46% say they're more enthusiastic than usual.

Compare that with 46% of Democratic registered voters saying the outcome matters more, and 36% saying they are more enthusiastic, according to the poll of 990 registered voters Friday-Sunday.

"There hasn't been as much Republican excitement here since Ronald Reagan ran against Jimmy Carter in 1980," says Carl Wick, the coordinator in Montgomery County, Ohio, for George W. Bush.

Republicans also have been following the election more closely than Democrats throughout the 40 days of the USA TODAY/CNN/Gallup Tracking Poll, which began Sept. 6. In the lastest poll results, Monday-Wednesday, 72% of Republicans say they have been giving the election "quite a lot" of thought, compared with 64% of Democrats.

▶ Gore, Bush plan for home stretch, 4A
▶ Barbara Bush interview, 7A

GOP voters excited

Those who say outcome matters more than in previous years:

Source: USA TODAY/CNN/Gallup Poll of 990 registered voters, Friday-Sunday

USA TODAY

Overall, 67% of registered voters answered "quite a lot," up from 62% four years ago at this time.

But at least one Republican pollster, Bill McInturff, warns against reading too much into enthusiasm in October.

"I've seen a lot of elections where the Democrats mobilize their base in the last 10 days, and the Republican advantage in intensity evaporates," McInturff says.

Intensity can make a difference in elections, says Curtis Gans, director of the non-partisan Committee for the Study of the American Electorate.

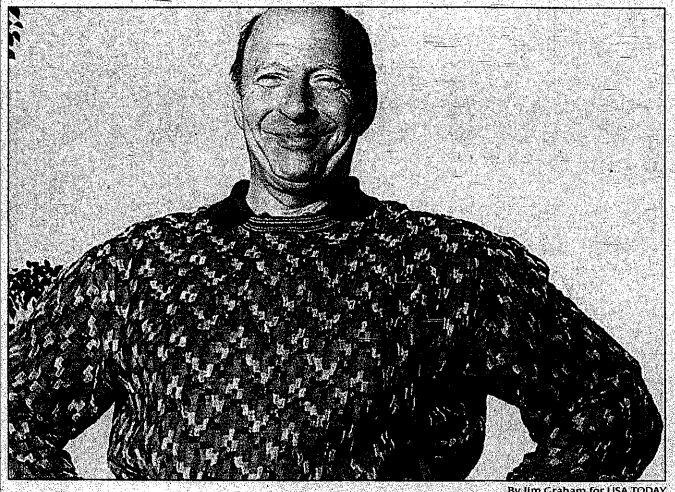
According to Gans, intensity among Democratic voters, especially those ages 18-29, helped elect Bill Clinton in 1992, while the intensity of GOP voters in 1994 helped win control of the House of Representatives.

Gallup analyst David Moore also points out that Democrats slightly outnumber Republicans nationally, so Republicans have to vote in disproportionately higher numbers to achieve parity. That's been reflected in the USA TODAY/CNN/Gallup Tracking Poll, where intensity among Republican likely voters has boosted Bush into the lead twice in the past two weeks.

▶ Latest tracking poll, 13A

What one donor got for $6.6M: Nothing

Civic duty, not favors or self-interest, motivates some big political contributors



By Jim Graham for USA TODAY

Top donor: Peter Buttenwieser has given millions to Democrats but doesn't ask for favors.

By Jim Drinkard
USA TODAY

PHILADELPHIA — Chances are you've never heard of Peter Buttenwieser, but to a lot of people in Washington, his name is golden.

An heir to his family's investment-banking fortune, Buttenwieser is the nation's most generous individual political donor. He has given at least $2.3 million in the past 21 months and plans to give thousands more by Election Day — all of it to Democrats.

So what does this unassuming benefactor want in return for his largesse? Nothing.

"I'm not struggling to make a corporation run, and I don't need any clauses written in" to any laws, says Buttenwieser, a short, balding man who favors sweaters and loafers over suits. "I neither want power nor need anybody to do anything to make life better for me."

In a political system driven by dollars, big donors are often equated with special interests seeking favors in Washington. Corporations, labor unions and business leaders pour millions into the system in hopes of winning or keeping tax breaks, regulatory relief or competitive advantage. This year, even as presidential candidates debate campaign finance reform, they've been doing it at a record-breaking pace. The 2000 cycle is on pace to be the first $3 billion election season.

Cover story

But Buttenwieser, 64, of Philadelphia, typifies a less-heralded category of political donor: wealthy individuals motivated by ideology and civic duty more than self-interest.

They can be found across the political spectrum. Betsy DeVos, former chairwoman of the Michigan Republican Party whose wealthy

Please see COVER STORY next page ▶