



The Gilded Chamber

Despite Claims of Representing Millions of Businesses, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Gets Most of Its Money From Just 64 Donors

Acknowledgments

This report was written by Sam Jewler, Communications Officer of Public Citizen's U.S. Chamber Watch project.

About Public Citizen

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Introduction

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce (hereinafter, “the Chamber” or “the U.S. Chamber”) claims to represent 3 million businesses. But in 2012, about 1,500 entities provided 94 percent of its contributions, and more than half of its contributions came from just 64 donors.

Similarly, an analysis of 2012 tax forms from the Chamber’s affiliated U.S. Chamber Institute for Legal Reform (ILR) shows that it also is funded largely by deep-pocketed entities. The average donor to the ILR gave \$454,110. Just 21 entities provided almost two-thirds of the ILR’s \$43.6 million in contributions.

On its website, the Chamber says it represents “the interests of more than 3 million businesses of all sizes, sectors, and regions. Our members range from mom-and-pop shops and local chambers to leading industry associations and large corporations.”¹ But as their donation numbers show, the bulk of the Chamber’s and ILR’s funding seems to come from the latter. [See Figure 1]

Figure 1: Comparison of Average Donations to the Chamber and ILR Reported on Groups’ 2012 990 Forms, Schedule B

	Total Itemized Donations	Number of Donors	Mean Donation	Median Donation	Mode Donation
U.S. Chamber of Commerce	\$169,439,286	1,523	\$111,254	\$20,000	\$10,000 (238 donations)
Institute for Legal Reform	\$43,594,536	96	\$454,110	\$250,000	\$250,000 (18 donations)

Source: Public Citizen analysis of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and U.S. Chamber Institute for Legal Reform 2012 Form 990 tax returns, Schedule B. Nonprofit organizations are required to report itemized contributions of \$5,000 or more on Schedule B. Contributions reported on Schedule B accounted for 94.5 percent of the total contributions that the Chamber reported on its 2012 Form 990 summary page and 100 percent of the ILR’s reported contributions.

Donations to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce

On Form 990, an Internal Revenue Service (IRS) form on which nonprofit organizations are required to report contributions of \$5,000 or more, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce reported receipt of 1,523 donations totaling \$169.4 million for 2012.² These contributions accounted for more than 94 percent of the U.S. Chamber’s total reported 2012 contributions of \$179.4 million. (The \$10 million not reported on the Schedule B

¹ *About the U.S. Chamber*, U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE (viewed on Feb. 4, 2014), <http://uscham.com/1bZHjil>.

² *U.S. Chamber of Commerce Form 990, Including Schedule B* (2012). (Obtained in person from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Jan. 7, 2014.)

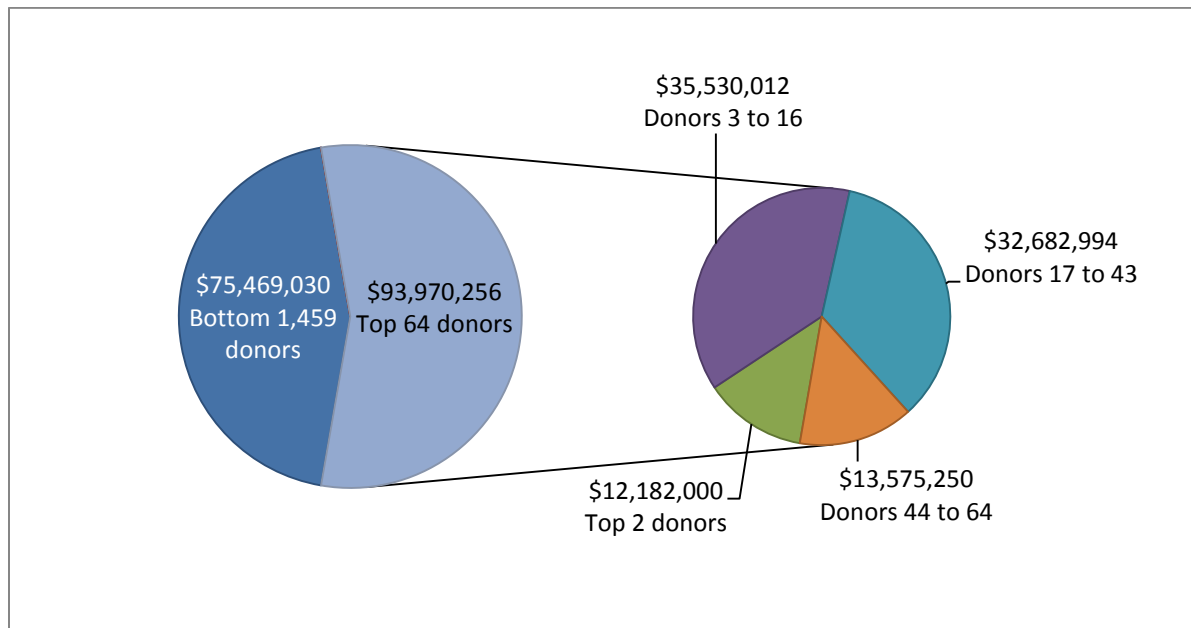
contribution list presumably represents the sum of contributions of less than \$5,000.) The reported contributions averaged \$111,254 per donor.

More than half of reported donors gave less than \$20,000; their contributions accounted for less than 5 percent of total contributions. [See Figures 2 and 3 below.] The top two donors together gave about one-and-a-half times what the bottom 781 reported donors gave. The top 64 donors, at \$500,000 and up, provided 52.4 percent of contributions.

Figure 2: U.S. Chamber Donor Profiles by Range

Donation Range	Number of Donors	Total Given	Average (mean) Donation	% of Reported Donors	% of All Contributions
\$5 million and more	2	\$12,182,000	\$6,091,000	0.1%	6.79%
\$2 million and up; less than \$5 million	14	\$35,530,012	\$2,537,858	0.9%	19.81%
\$1 million and up; less than \$2 million	27	\$32,682,994	\$1,210,481	1.8%	18.22%
\$500k and up; less than \$1 million	21	\$13,575,250	\$646,440	1.4%	7.57%
\$100k and up; less than \$500k	307	\$52,380,986	\$170,622	20.2%	29.20%
\$20k and up; less than \$100k	371	\$14,908,561	\$40,184	24.4%	8.31%
\$5k and up; less than \$20k	781	\$8,179,483	\$10,473	51.3%	4.56%

Source: Public Citizen analysis of U.S. Chamber of Commerce's 2012 Form 990 tax return, including Schedule B, on which nonprofit organizations report itemized contributions of \$5,000 or more. Except for "% of All Contributions" column, figures in this table pertain to itemized contributions listed on Schedule B. These itemized contributions accounted for 94.5 percent of the total contributions the Chamber reported receiving for 2012 on its Form 990 summary page.

Figure 3: The U.S. Chamber's Fundraising and Its Big 64 Donors Broken Down

Source: Public Citizen analysis of U.S. Chamber of Commerce's 2012 Form 990 tax return.

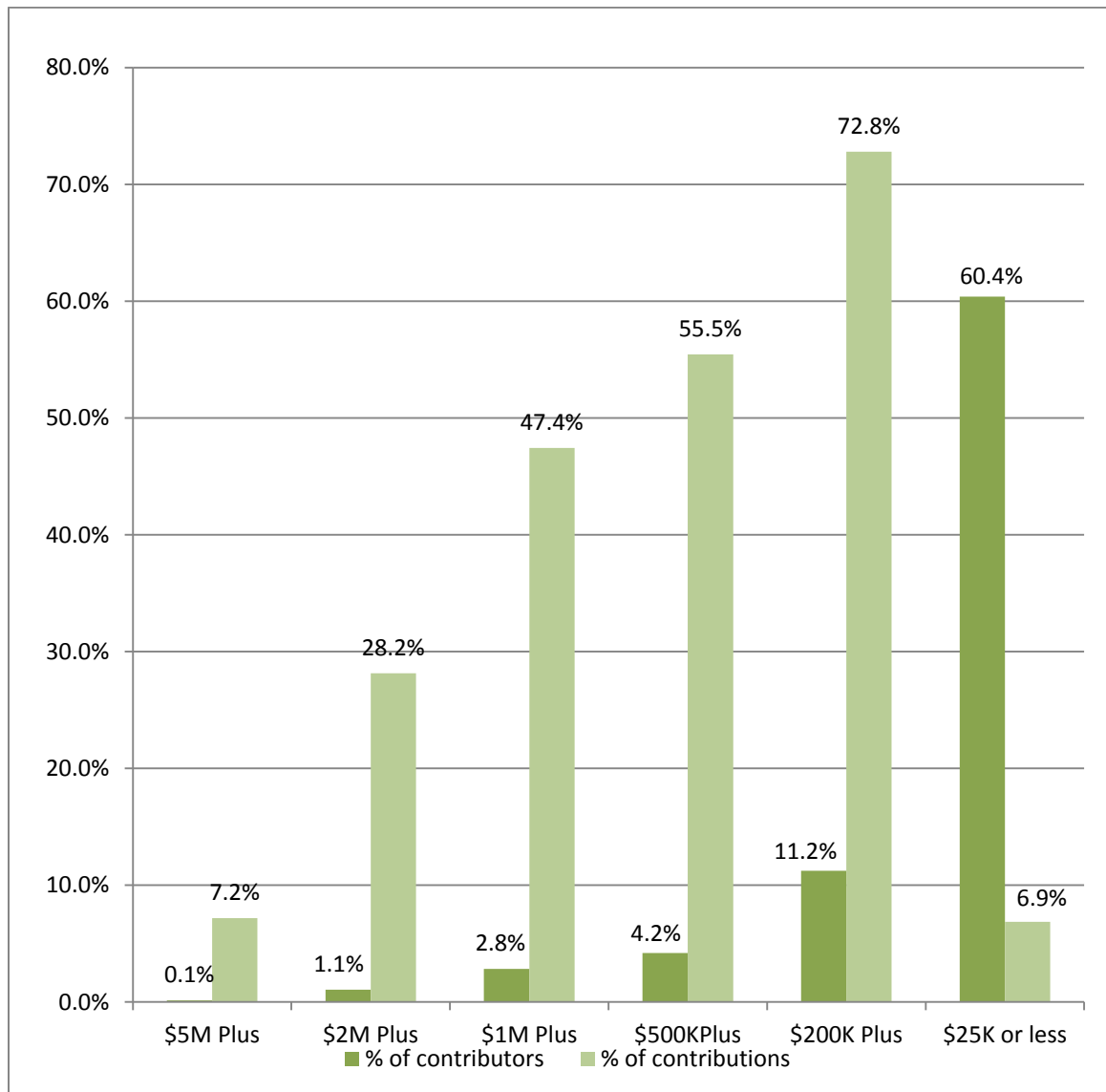
U.S. Chamber President Thomas J. Donohue once wrote that small firms “provide the foot soldiers, and often the political cover, for issues big companies want pursued.”³ Meanwhile the Chamber receives the bulk of its funding from a relatively small number of big donors.

The top 43 donors to the Chamber—each of which contributed \$1 million or more—gave a total of \$80.4 million. Thus, these 43 donors accounted for 47.4 percent of the reported contributions.

Within that upper echelon, the top 16 donations, from entities giving \$2 million or more, totaled \$47.7 million. That means the top 16 contributors added up to 28.1 percent of the reported contributions.

At the very top, the five largest donors, giving at least \$3 million, contributed a total of \$22.8 million. The largest contribution was \$7.2 million, followed by contributions of \$5 million and \$4.1 million.

³ *The Chamber of Commerce Has Been Transformed Into One of the Most Powerful Political Forces in Washington*, THE ECONOMIST, (2012) <http://read.bi/1bZHBqH>.

Figure 4: Composition of Donors to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce

The sources of most of this money remain unknown. Although nonprofits are required to make the Schedule B forms of their tax returns available to the public, they are permitted to redact the identities of contributors that are listed on these forms. The Chamber chooses to make such redactions. The Center for Public Integrity pieced together contributions to the Chamber and other nonprofits that corporations have voluntarily reported and could identify the sources for only \$11 million of the \$179.4 million in contributions the Chamber reported receiving in 2012.⁴ Only one of the Chamber's top 35 donors for that year appears

⁴ Michael Beckel, *Top U.S. Corporations Funneled \$173 Million to Political Nonprofits*, THE CENTER FOR PUBLIC INTEGRITY (Jan. 16, 2014) <http://bit.ly/1bqFX4v>

to be publicly known. Dow Chemical Co. disclosed giving \$2.9 million, the Chamber's sixth biggest receipt.⁵

2012 Donations to the U.S. Chamber Institute for Legal Reform

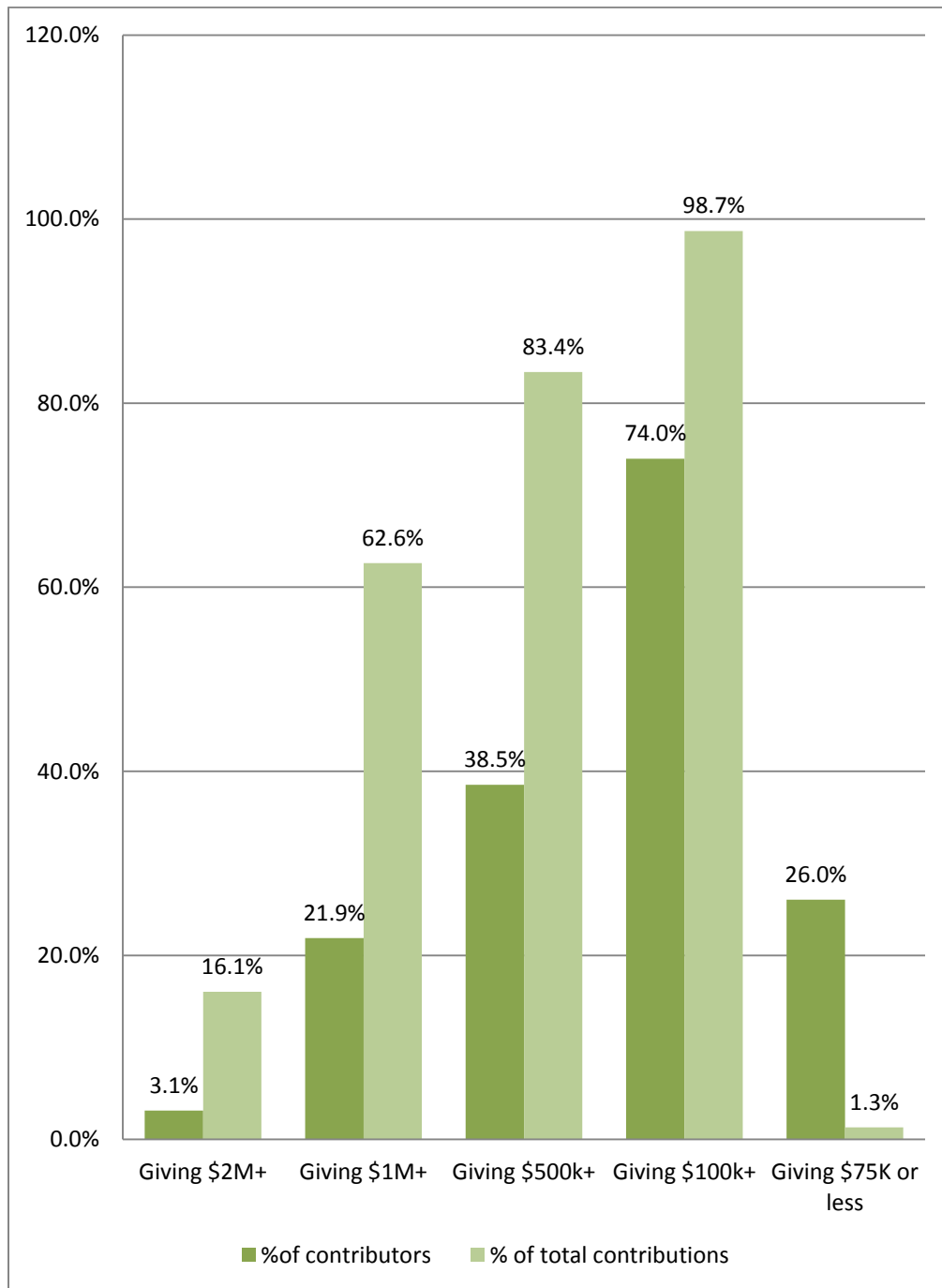
The fundraising profile of the U.S. Chamber Institute for Legal Reform (ILR) is stacked even more toward large donors. The ILR reported raising \$43.6 million from only 96 donors. Its average donation of \$454,110 was much higher than the average reported donation to the U.S. Chamber.

The ILR has some smaller donors, but more than half of the contributions were \$250,000 or larger.⁶

In turn, 71 of the ILR's 96 donations were for \$100,000 or more, totaling \$43 million. This means that 74 percent of the ILR's donations were \$100,000 or more. [See Figure 5.]

⁵ Michael Beckel, *Top U.S. Corporations Funneled \$173 Million to Political Nonprofits*, THE CENTER FOR PUBLIC INTEGRITY (Jan. 16, 2014) <http://bit.ly/1bqFX4v>

⁶ The ILR's reported contributions of \$5,000 or more account for 100 percent of all of its contributions for 2012.

Figure 5: Composition of Donors to the ILR, 2012

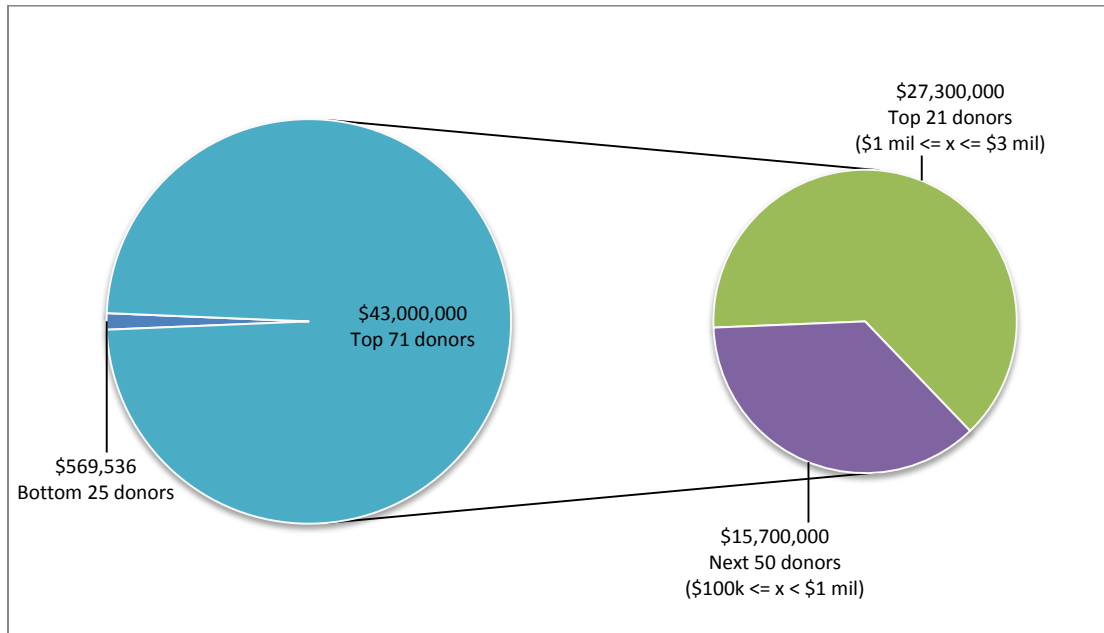
The Chamber gets a large number of donations of a relatively wide range of sizes, but it is dominated by donations in the high hundreds of thousands and the millions. However, the ILR's coffers are essentially composed of only donations in the hundreds of thousands and the millions.

Figure 6: ILR Donor Profiles by Range

Donation Range	Number of Donors	Total Given	Average (Mean) Donation	% of Reported Donors	% of All Contributions
\$2 million and more	3	\$7,000,000	\$218,750	3.1%	16.1%
\$1 million and up; less than \$2 million	18	\$20,300,000	\$1,127,777	18.8%	46.6%
\$500k and up; less than \$1 million	16	\$9,050,000	\$565,625	16.7%	20.8%
\$100k and up; less than \$500k	34	\$6,675,000	\$196,323	35.4%	15.3%
Less than \$100k	25	\$569,536	\$22,781	26.0%	1.3%

Source: Public Citizen analysis of Institute for Legal Reform’s 2012 Form 990 tax return.

Figure 7: The ILR's Fundraising and Its Big 71 Donors Broken Down



Conclusion

The funding profiles of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and its Institute for Legal Reform are dominated by donations in the hundreds of thousands and millions of dollars, suggesting that the groups are likely to be heavily influenced by very large companies.

Between the 1,523 donors that made reported donations to the U.S. Chamber and the 96 that gave to the ILR, about 1,600 entities finance the nation's largest corporate lobbying group and its affiliate advocating against consumer access to courts. In 2012, more than half of the U.S. Chamber's and ILR's money came from 64 and 21 supporters respectively, who were able and willing to collectively donate about \$121 million in one year—which speaks volumes about the two groups' makeups.