

DA, judge races dominate Fresno County campaign spending in 2014

By John
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Fresno County District Attorney Lisa A. Smittcamp

In 2014, Fresno County's legal world ruled its political world.

The final campaign finance numbers are in, and the Fresno County District Attorney's race between Lisa A. Smittcamp and Elizabeth Egan, as well as the Fresno County judge's race that pitted Lisa Gamoian against Rachel Hill, garnered a grand total of more than \$2.5 million in contributions.

Even bigger was the campaign spending — in excess of \$2.67 million total by the four candidates in the two races.

As big as the numbers were some of the loans and the massive financial backing from prominent companies or individuals supporting one of the four candidates.

In the DA's race, Smittcamp raised almost \$900,000 in the latter part of 2013 and all of 2014. Of that, \$150,000 came

from campaign loans from her husband, Brent, and an additional \$50,000 loan from Lyons-Magnus, a company controlled by her father-in-law, Bob Smittcamp. Those loans remain unpaid. The rest came from campaign contributions and in-kind contributions (for example, nearly \$70,000 from the Smittcamp-family owned Wawona Packing) for things such as office space, a voter survey and web design.

Smittcamp also owes a \$20,000 “win bonus” to Tim Orman, her consultant, according to her campaign finance statement.

Egan raised around \$450,000 and spent more than \$520,000, though as an incumbent her account has money left from past years.

She also had a \$100,000 loan from Direct File, a company owned by her husband, Richard. Of that, \$35,000 is unpaid.

Smittcamp won the DA’s race in the June primary, and took over the post in January.

In the judges’ race, Gamoian raised more than \$615,000 and her spending slightly exceeded that total. Hill wasn’t far behind, raising about \$612,000 and also spending a bit in excess of what she raised.

Most of the money for both Gamoian and Hill came from campaign contributions. Gamoian also loaned herself \$30,000, and Hill \$25,000 plus another \$5,000 loan from a second source. Gamoian’s loan is unpaid, and Hill owes around \$23,500.

Already well known are the big financial backers of Hill and Gamoian.

Ed Kashian, Gamoian’s uncle, contributed more than \$435,000, either on his own or through Kashian Enterprises or Lance-Kashian & Co. That means Kashian accounted for around 70% of Gamoian’s campaign cash.

Granville Homes, led by President Darius Assemi, contributed more than \$157,000 to Hill. Assemi’s contributions — which came from various Granville Homes entites — added up to more than a quarter of Hill’s total contributions.

Gamoian won that race and assumed her seat on the Fresno County Superior Court last month.

All told, Fresno’s legal world may never see another political year like 2014, at least financially speaking. It combined wealthy and well-known families, as well as wealthy and influential individuals, in a once-in-a-lifetime political collision.

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