

San Jose Mercury News

Special report: Two Giants owners lead Bay Area sports in campaign contributions — and they're big Trump supporters

SF Giants owners Charles B. Johnson, Deborah Magowan have given millions to assist Republican candidates, including President Donald Trump's re-election bid

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Mike Coppola/Getty Images for the New York Philharmonic

San Francisco Giants principal owner Charles B. Johnson, shown with his wife, Ann, is known for his contributions to conservative causes. He has given \$4.2 million in this election cycle. (Photo by Mike Coppola/Getty Images for the New York Philharmonic)

By [ELLIOTT ALMOND](#) | ealmond@bayareanewsgroup.com | Bay Area News Group

PUBLISHED: October 29, 2020

San Francisco is known for its liberal politics. But two owners of the city's beloved Giants baseball team have poured almost \$5 million into campaigns supporting Republican candidates, including the re-election of President Donald Trump.

Principal owner Charles B. Johnson has long been known for his staunch support of conservative causes. Recent reports showed the billionaire who lives in Florida gives more money to campaigns than any other sports owner, including \$4.2 million for this election cycle.

Another member of the Giants ownership group, Deborah Magowan, has given \$759,255 to 43 Republican campaigns for 2020, according to the Federal Election Commission (FEC).

With those exceptions, Trump and Democrat challenger Joe Biden are not getting much financial support from the Bay Area professional sports world, records show, as a heated presidential election reaches the finish line on Tuesday.

Instead, the owners, executives and athletes that represent the region's seven pro teams, counting the recently departed Las Vegas Raiders, are contributing mostly to state races — if they donate at all, according to databases that track political financing.

And in the year of the activist athlete in the wake of George Floyd, an unarmed Black man, dying under the knee of a Minneapolis police officer, Bay Area pros are not spending much money to support any candidate or political action committee, records show.

“You have the athletes who will act out on the playing field, but you have the owners act out through their political dollars,” said Bruce F. Freed, president of the [Center for Political Accountability](#), a non-partisan watchdog organization. “But today, owners, companies and anybody who contributes have to realize contributions have consequences.”

It is difficult to quantify what kind of effect Johnson's spending has had on the Giants' fanbase. Of the \$4.2 million he has contributed, \$435,000 has been earmarked for Trump's re-election bid, according to records from the [Federal Election Commission](#) and two non-partisan groups that monitor campaign financing — [the National Institute on Money in Politics](#) and the [Center for Responsive Politics](#). The total of more than \$4 million equals what all 32 NFL owners combined gave to federal races, according to the Center for Responsive Politics.

The picture for this election cycle is incomplete because Federal Election Commission filings will not be updated until after the vote. Also, experts say individuals can funnel money in secretive ways to hide their exposure.

Johnson, who owns between 25% and 30% percent of the Giants, gave money to two Democrats. One is Rep. Jackie Speier, who represents much of the Peninsula where

he used to live, and the other is Greggor Ilagan, who is running for a seat in the Hawaii state House of Representatives.

Johnson declined to comment through a Giants team spokeswoman.

Two years ago, he [faced scrutiny](#) for giving money to a political action committee, or PAC, that aired a racially charged radio advertisement that supported an Arkansas congressman. In a statement, Johnson said at the time he did not know his donation would be used for such a purpose.

“I, like the Giants organization, strongly condemn any form of racism and in no way condone the advertisement that was created by this entity,” said Johnson, the retired chairman of Franklin Templeton Investments.

The Giants said at the time Johnson’s political donations are separate from his ownership stake.

“The Giants’ reputation as one of the most inclusive and socially engaged professional sports teams in the nation speaks for itself,” the team said in the 2018 statement. “In no way do the Giants condone this disturbing and divisive political activity.”

Johnson, 87, has retired from active duty with the Giants. His son, Gregory Johnson of Hillsborough, became the club’s control person last year.

Gregory Johnson gave \$38,400, mostly to the Republican National Committee. Giants chief executive Larry Baer gave \$10,850 to Democrats, including \$5,300 to Biden since last year, according to FEC filings.

Magowan, whose husband Peter Magowan died in 2019, gave \$218,000 to support Trump’s re-election, according to the Federal Election Commission. She could not be reached for comment.

The Giants did not respond to questions about what impact the owners’ contributions might have on the business.

“It is interesting there is no blowback for Charlie Johnson’s contributions to Trump in the Bay Area given the liberalism in Oakland and San Francisco,” the watchdog Freed said.

The fact that the Giants failed to make the Major League Baseball playoffs and are in the offseason might play a role in the lack of a reaction, Freed added. News of the radio ad also broke during the offseason in 2018.

John Fisher, the owner of the Oakland Athletics and San Jose Earthquakes, is another active contributor to political races. The San Francisco billionaire gave

\$90,400 in this election cycle. Only \$11,200 of the money went to support four Republicans in national races, including Sen. Susan Collins (R-Maine).

He also gave \$22,200 to six Democrats running in the presidential primary this year. That included current vice presidential nominee Kamala Harris but not Biden. Fisher, whose parents founded Gap, Inc., also supported six Democrats in California state races.

The Athletics gave another \$17,200 to support candidates running for the California State Assembly.

Fisher, who rarely gives interviews, could not be reached for comment.

Few owners have faced as much attention as the San Francisco 49ers' Jed York, who has [contributed \\$3 million](#) to a political action committee that supports four Santa Clara City Council candidates.

York, 40, also has been active in California state legislature races this election season, records show. He has contributed \$44,000 to 20 candidates, including 17 Democrats.

Nationally, York gave Kamala Harris \$1,000 last year for her failed presidential bid.

The team also gave \$12,000 to support state legislature candidates.

Rahul Chandhok, York's spokesman on policy matters, did not respond to email and phone calls seeking comment.

York's uncle, former 49ers owner Eddie DeBartolo, gave Trump's campaign \$375 in February, records show.

By contrast, Las Vegas Raiders owner Mark Davis has sat out this election cycle. Records show he gave \$5,000 in 2019 to the Gridiron PAC, a lobbying arm of the NFL that funnels money to Democrats and Republicans.

However, team president Marc Badain has given Biden \$5,600 since 2019, records show.

If NFL players donate anything, they give to the players union PAC, according to a review of donations by select Raiders and 49ers, as well as local products such as Tom Brady and Aaron Rodgers. One of the outliers is the Raiders' Richie Incognito, an injured left guard well known for supporting conservative issues. Incognito has made 37 contributions totaling \$24,460 to Trump and other Republican campaigns, according to the data.

While the Golden State Warriors have a reputation as one of America's most progressive professional teams, their owners, executives and players are not contributing much money in this election.

Principal owner Joe Lacob did not make any contribution of more than \$250, the minimum amount that must be reported. Partner Peter Guber gave Biden's campaign \$1,000 last year and state Assemblyman Phil Ting (D-San Francisco) \$1,000 this year.

Warriors coach Steve Kerr, who [appeared in a Lincoln Project video](#) this week in support of Biden, gave \$7,400 since 2019. Records show that \$5,600 of it went to Democrat Mark Kelly's senatorial race in Arizona. Steph Curry, Draymond Green and Klay Thompson did not contribute, records show.

P.J. Johnston, a team spokesman, said Warriors players use their celebrity and voice in meaningful ways.

"But the team is non-partisan," he said. "It is a sports and entertainment business. It is not the chosen role of the team to get financially involved in the political process and in the campaign world."

San Jose Sharks owner Hasso Plattner, a German national, is not permitted to contribute directly to federal, state or local elections. Many of the Sharks' top players also are foreign nationals. The San Jose Earthquakes have a similar situation with foreign players but their U.S.-born athletes are not contributing money, according to the records.

"Athletes avoid sticking their necks out," said Ethan Scheiner, University of California, Davis political science professor who studies the intersection of sports and politics. "Partly, they are not that political. But there is a bit of a risk of standing up for a candidate."