

Fighting, not funding

South Florida's the center of the recount battle, but few big election donors here want to pay for this fight

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Review Staff

If the vote for the next U.S. president were cast in dollars, the winner would still be undecided in South Florida.

As Democrats and Republicans chase contributions by phone, fax and e-mail in an effort to bankroll the post-election battle between the parties, few South Floridians seem to be giving to either side.

As of Nov. 15, the Republicans have raised \$2.5 million nationally, according to a spokeswoman in the Austin, Texas, office of the Bush-Cheney Recount Fund. On the other side, the Gore-Lieberman Recount Committee has reportedly raised \$3 million, a figure the party does not dispute.

For the Republicans so far, little of the money has come from South Florida, even though the region is at the epicenter of the battle. A review of contributors to the Bush-Cheney Recount Fund shows that fewer than a dozen of the approximately 1,600 contributors posted on the committee's Web site are from South Florida. What's more, those South Florida contributions add up to a paltry \$1,065.

However, many more contributors apparently still need to be added to the list. The Bush-Cheney committee says it has received money from some 9,000 contributors in all, and will add contributions to the disclosure list as those donations are processed.

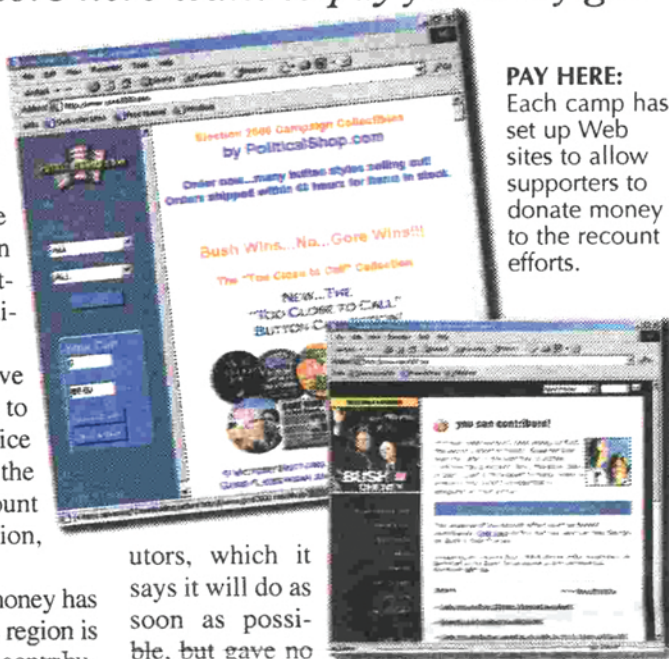
Meanwhile, the Gore-Lieberman Recount Committee has yet to post its list of fund contrib-

utors, which it says it will do as soon as possible, but gave no specific date.

The Gore-Lieberman committee is making a blanket appeal for money and isn't targeting South Florida in particular, says Rick Hess, spokesman for the Democratic National Committee in Washington, D.C.

Still, plenty of South Floridians are hearing the appeal.

"Both sides have the money machines working very aggressively and very efficiently," says South Florida lobbyist Ron Book.



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Each camp has set up Web sites to allow supporters to donate money to the recount efforts.

South Florida to candidates seeking recount dollars: We already gave

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Based on conversations with Democrats and Republicans, Book believes that loyal party members from both sides are not likely to abandon the cause in the waning hours of the election battle.



de la Pena

Among the Republican Party loyalists supporting the fund is Leo de la Pena, a Miami lawyer who says he wrote a \$5,000 check, though that money has yet to show up on the Bush-Cheney fund disclosure list.

"I'm happy to help Gov. Bush's campaign to rightfully assume his lawfully elected position as president of the United States," de la Pena said.

Although Federal Election Commission rules limit personal contributions to \$1,000 per person for each leg of the race, the sky is the limit for the post-election

skirmishes. The Republicans have placed a \$5,000 limit on post-election contributions. The Democrats have not set a contributions limit.

Federal rules don't require that the donations be disclosed or reported to federal authorities, though both sides say they

Also giving money is Dr. Zachariah P. Zachariah, director of cardiology at Holy Cross Hospital in Broward County. Zachariah said he plans to contribute \$5,000 to the Republican Party.

"I think the hand count is the wrong thing to do," he said. "Doing a hand

gation and the Republican countermoves. "It think this is the wrong thing to do. This won't end," he said.

Added a prominent lawyer, who also has mixed feelings about the battle and who also asked not to be identified: "I've gotten e-mails from both camps. I haven't responded to any."

While some have been hit up for dollars, others have been solicited for time and labor. For instance, lawyers at Akerman Senterfitt & Eidson have been asked to donate staff for the ballot count, according to Jonathan Awner, a partner. And although the firm has declined to represent either party in the post-election legal battle, the firm did circulate an e-mail about the need for ballot counters. But beyond that, Akerman clings to its highly publicized position of neutrality. The potential fallout from taking one side or the other is too great.

"We don't need to get in the mud, particularly if you're not getting paid," said Awner, who questions the ability of the recount committees to raise enough money to pay the legal bills. ■

A Broward banker received post-election requests for \$5,000 from both parties. He declined to give, based on his disapproval of the Democratic litigation and the Republican countermoves.

plan to disclose all the donations. However, some restrictions do exist. For example, corporations and labor unions are not allowed to make contributions, although their political action committees can contribute.

"It's a completely new set of fund-raising rules," said de la Pena.

count will only make things worse."

Still, many more South Floridians are refusing to give.

One banking executive in Broward who asked not to be identified recently received requests for \$5,000 from both parties. In disgust, he declined to give, based on his disapproval of the Democratic liti-