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## Gary's glitzy gala: Herbert raises \$1M in elaborate fundraiser

Politics » Big spenders get face time with the governor.

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Some 1,900 business and political moguls opened their checkbooks to the tune of \$1 million to support Gov. Gary Herbert in what is believed to be the largest single-night fundraising haul in Utah history for any candidate not named Mitt Romney.

Herbert said in brief remarks that he and his supporters shared a common vision for better days for the state, despite the current difficulties.

"If you're out of work, it's a difficult time out there, and we appreciate the fact that many of you are out there as business people creating wealth and creating jobs," the governor said. "We'll be working hard to make sure we empower the private sector to make sure they do what they do best and that is grow the economy."

Herbert encouraged his backers to find a cause or charity during the holiday season that they can help and presented a check for \$26,000 to the Utah Food Bank -- half of which came from his political action committee.

Low-income advocate Pamela Atkinson thanked the governor and said the donation would help feed more than 220,000 hungry Utahns.

The event raked in more than \$1 million to the Friends of Gary R. Herbert political action committee as attendees dined on tenderloin and scallops. The governor can use the money for various political expenses or shift the money to his election campaign.

Herbert, who inherited the office in August when Gov. Jon Huntsman Jr. was confirmed as U.S. ambassador to China, has to stand for election in 2010.

"As far as the money, I don't think there will have been any bigger," said Utah Republican Party Chairman Dave Hansen of the gala, which has been an annual tradition for the governor for more than a decade.

Herbert was able to raise such an impressive sum, in part because he broke with Huntsman's tradition for his past few years in office of not accepting contributions of more than \$10,000.

Herbert established sponsorship levels of \$10,000, \$25,000 and, at the upper limit, \$50,000. More than half of the \$1 million he raised came from those deep-pocketed donors -- Realtors, developers, construction firms and energy companies.

A citizens' ethics initiative would impose caps on campaign contributions, and the Governor's Commission on Strengthening Utah's Democracy, appointed by Huntsman, has recommended adopting limits on campaign donations.

"I think everyone will agree this is a 'Who's Who' of the business community," said Chris Sloan, president of the Utah Association of Realtors, whose political action committee pledged \$50,000 to Herbert for the evening's festivities. "This was an opportunity to have a captive audience of people who need to hear that we're around."

As a sponsor of the event, the Realtors received a special on-stage recognition, got a premium spot, and access to a special VIP reception with Herbert and Lt. Gov. Greg Bell.

Sloan said the organization has been a leading backer of Herbert, who made his living as a Realtor and was president of the organization in the 1980s.

"Gary is a longtime supporter of personal property rights," Sloan said. "He has been a friend of ours ever since he sat in my chair 20-some years ago."

Matthew Burbank, a political science professor at the University of Utah, said the huge fundraiser is an example of the advantage an incumbent - particularly an incumbent governor - enjoys and can be used to scare off potential challengers.

"It's absolutely the case that the kind of money the governor is raising now is going to have an impact on the calculations other people are making about whether they want to get into the race," Burbank said.

So far, no challenger from either party has stepped up to take on Herbert and several who had considered a gubernatorial bid have said they won't run. Salt Lake County Mayor Peter Corroon is seen as the most likely Democratic challenger; Sen. John Valentine, R-Orem, has considered a bid and will announce his intentions in the coming weeks.

"Something about having a million dollars in the bank tends to make people who might be looking at [a challenge] think twice," Hansen said.

Herbert defended the contributions earlier this month, saying he faces a "unique circumstance" that other governors haven't had to face and the flood of money would not make it impossible for challengers to take on the incumbent.

"I am the little guy," he said. "I need to be able to have those people who believe in me to support me in extraordinary ways. There's the rich guy out there that can come and self-fund."

Utah is one of just five states in the country that has no limits on who may contribute to political causes and how much they can give. Herbert said by opposing limits on campaign contributions, he makes it possible for challengers to raise money and take him on.

And the money doesn't influence his decision-making, he said.

"Whether I got \$50,000 or \$10,000 or \$5,000, you could have the same argument. You know, are you buying your politician? Are you buying influence, access?" he said. "But why is \$50,000 too much and \$25,000 not? ... Either you believe your politicians are honest or not, and I think that you ought to address that based on their conduct."

#### Big donors

The following are some of the big-dollar donors to Gov. Gary Herbert's "Moonstruck" gala:

\$50,000 donors:

Deseret Power and Utah Rural Electric PAC

Merit Medical

Utah Association of Realtors

Wadsworth Brothers Construction

\$25,000 donors:

Beesmark Investments & BMA Construction

Bill Barrett Corp.

Clyde Companies

Dennison Mines

EsNet Group

Layton Companies

Price Realty Group

Rancho Markets

Reagan Outdoor

Western States Mechanical

Workers Compensation Fund

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