



The Star-Ledger

'Pay-to-play' list shows who gave and who got

Tuesday, April 08, 2008

BY DUNSTAN McNICHOL
Star-Ledger Staff

Insurers and highway contractors dominated the state's second annual tally of public contracts, released yesterday by the Election Law Enforcement Commission.

According to the report, Horizon Healthcare of New Jersey collected \$945.3 million from 264 public contracts last year, the largest total. Of that, \$842.3 million came from a single Medicaid contract with the state. Prudential Insurance and three other insurers also ranked in the top 10 among public contractors last year, the tally shows.

The other five spots in the top 10 were held by highway contracting firms like Tilcon New York of Wharton and Conti Enterprises Inc. of South Plainfield.

The Election Law Enforcement Commission said 1,669 companies filed reports by this week's deadline. They reported collecting \$5.4 billion in public contract payments, while making a total of \$15.2 million in political contributions to state and local political campaigns.

This is the second year the state Election Law Enforcement Commission has publicized the contract earnings of private companies whose employees or officers have made political contributions. The annual tally is a component of reform legislation designed to shine a light on the practice called "pay-to-play," in which companies seeking public work donate to the political officials who could have a hand in awarding public work.

"It's a useful tool," said Heather Taylor of the Citizens Campaign, a statewide effort to promote pay-to-play limits in government contracting. "This helps highlight the need to extend pay-to-play regulations to local political organizations."

Engineering firms monopolized the top rankings as the most generous campaign donors: The top three were T & M Associates of Middletown, with \$760,625 in contributions; CME Associates of Parlin with \$524,135 in donations, and Remington & Vernick of Haddonfield, with \$507,845.

Last year, 2,173 companies reported collecting a total of \$10.3 billion in public fees, but lawmakers pared down the list of companies that have to report this year, passing legislation that exempted not-for-profit organizations like hospitals from having to report their earnings and contributions.

The new listing shows companies and law firms who have state lawmakers on their payrolls got a healthy share of public work. Contracting partnerships that included Joseph M. Sanzari Inc. of Hackensack took in \$122 million from 164 public contracts, the tally shows. State Sen. Paul Sarlo (D-Bergen) works for Sanzari.

Remington & Vernick, the South Jersey engineering firm that employs Assemblyman Louis Greenwald (D-Camden) as its in-house counsel, reported earning \$27.9 million from 113 public jobs last year. And seven law firms that include state lawmakers among their partners reported collecting a total of \$8.47 million in public funds last year.

Dunstan McNichol may be reached at dmcnichol@starledger.com or (609) 989-0341.