

A record amount went to lobbying California's government. Who were the biggest spenders?



BY JEREMIA KIMELMAN FEBRUARY 12, 2024

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James Michael Agpalo, an intern lobbyist, views the state Senate Appropriations Committee session on suspense file day at the state Capitol in Sacramento on Sept. 1, 2023. Photo by Rahul Lal for CalMatters [IN SUMMARY](#)

Companies and organizations spent more than \$480 million on lobbyists who sought to influence the Legislature, the governor's office and state agencies.

Last year was a good year to be a lobbyist in California.

Advocacy efforts shattered records in 2023, with nearly \$480 million poured into influencing legislation and regulatory decisions making their way through state government. That amount eclipsed the previous high \$440 million spent in 2022, based on figures from the California Secretary of State.

A record amount of money was spent on lobbying California in last year

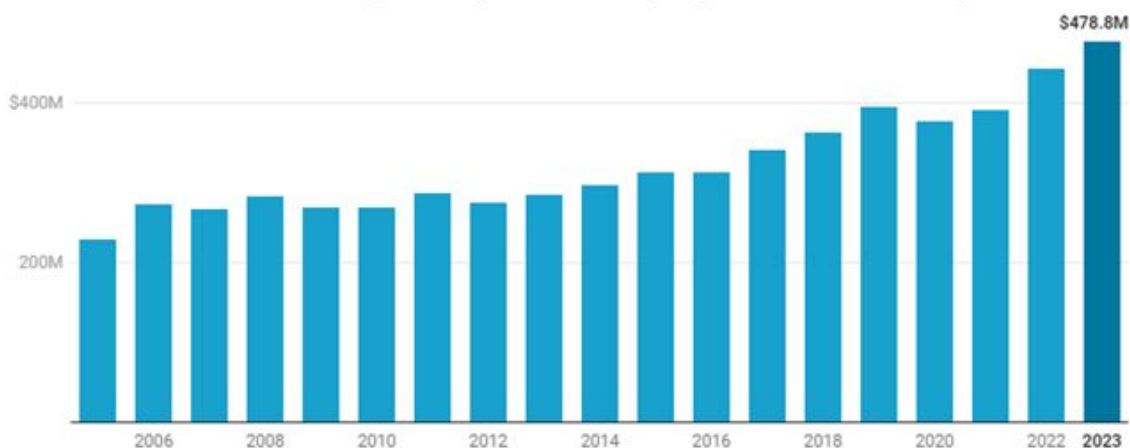


Chart: Jeremia Kimelman, CalMatters • Source: California Secretary of State • Get the data • Created with Datawrapper

Year	General Lobbying	CPUC Lobbying	Total Lobbying
2005	\$226,159,169.31	\$2,528,584.03	\$228,687,753.34
2006	\$269,526,413.28	\$3,208,284.23	\$272,734,697.51
2007	\$264,705,745.80	\$3,041,127.73	\$267,746,873.53
2008	\$279,273,939.89	\$3,438,828.06	\$282,712,767.95
2009	\$264,830,662.14	\$5,347,975.25	\$270,178,637.39
2010	\$265,638,590.65	\$3,635,399.44	\$269,273,990.09
2011	\$284,068,653.77	\$3,799,582.20	\$287,868,235.97
2012	\$273,961,022.83	\$2,570,703.53	\$276,531,726.36
2013	\$281,884,185.21	\$2,763,591.44	\$284,647,776.65
2014	\$295,839,003.64	\$2,377,499.83	\$298,216,503.47
2015	\$309,187,956.93	\$4,984,262.14	\$314,172,219.07
2016	\$309,382,070.82	\$3,362,170.22	\$312,744,241.04
2017	\$337,898,617.76	\$3,480,026.85	\$341,378,644.61
2018	\$359,796,172.08	\$2,899,446.75	\$362,695,618.83
2019	\$392,348,689.86	\$4,331,381.01	\$396,680,070.87
2020	\$374,445,343.32	\$3,899,373.31	\$378,344,716.63
2021	\$381,987,253.48	\$9,206,114.48	\$391,193,367.96
2022	\$437,625,023.96	\$5,515,685.63	\$443,140,709.59
2023	\$475,709,933.58	\$3,073,514.16	\$478,783,447.74
Total	\$6,084,268,448.31	\$73,463,550.29	\$6,157,731,998.60

The top three organizations who spent the most on lobbying last year were Chevron (\$11.1 million), the Hawaiian Gardens Casino (\$9.1 million) and the Western States Petroleum Association (\$6.9 million). The same three organizations were [already spending the most money](#) on lobbying headed into the final quarter of the year.

But what about the other top spenders? The ten largest patrons of persuasion put a combined \$57 million into trying to convince government officials in 2023, or 12% of the total spent on lobbying that year.

#1: Chevron

Chevron, a California-based oil company, is a prolific spender on lobbyists, forking over \$74.5 million since 2005 to influence state government. In the final quarter of 2023, Chevron [reported](#) spending \$1.2 million to try and get its way with state officials, including Gov. Gavin Newsom, and several state agencies, such as the Public Utilities Commission, the Air Resources Board and the Energy Commission. One of its primary advocacy goals was to influence the implementation of a [bill](#) — [signed by Newsom last March](#) — that empowered the Energy Commission to establish a maximum profit margin for refining gasoline.

#2: Hawaiian Garden Casino

The Los Angeles County-based Hawaiian Garden Casino went all-in last year, spending more than four-fifths of all the lobbying dollars it has invested over the past two decades. It [continued to lobby](#) on [a so-far unsuccessful bill](#) related to casino regulations and [reported](#) trying to influence the Bureau of Gambling Control on a blackjack proposal. The casino really ramped up its spending as the year drew to a close, racking up nearly 45% of its lobbying bill in the last quarter.

#3: Western States Petroleum Association

The Western States Petroleum Association, an oil industry trade group, is consistently a top employer of lobbyists aimed at the state and has been one of the top three spenders in every legislative session going back at least a decade. In the fourth quarter of 2023, it [reported](#) lobbying the Legislature and the governor’s office and other state agencies. Among other issues, the trade group lobbied on a proposed [windfall profit tax](#) on refining gas that was eventually watered down.

Look through every organization that lobbied the state government in 2023



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Table with 3 columns and 3564 rows. Currently displaying rows 1 to 10.

	Name	Lobbying in 2023	Lobbying in the 4th quarter
1	CHEVRON U.S.A., INC. AND AFFILIATES	\$11,196,343	\$1,201,819
2	HAWAIIAN GARDENS CASINO	\$9,150,037	\$4,039,667
3	WESTERN STATES PETROLEUM ASSOCIATION	\$6,935,431	\$1,611,604
4	MC DONALD'S CORPORATION	\$5,671,085	\$681,400
5	PACIFICORP	\$5,049,612	\$2,010,067
6	ENERGY FOUNDATION	\$4,341,612	\$280,966
7	CALIFORNIA STATE COUNCIL OF SERVICE EMPLOYEES	\$3,946,376	\$638,636

Table with 3 columns and 3564 rows. Currently displaying rows 1 to 10.

	Name	Lobbying in 2023	Lobbying in the 4th quarter
8	WAYMO LLC	\$3,838,812	\$1,895,319
9	CALIFORNIA HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION/CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION OF HOSPITALS AND HEALTH SYSTEMS	\$3,565,574	\$596,212
10	CALIFORNIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE	\$3,465,227	\$1,189,623

Table: Jeremia Kimelman, CalMattersSource: [California Secretary of State](#)Get the dataCreated with [Datawrapper](#)

#4: McDonald's

McDonald's spent more than \$5.6 million on lobbying in 2023, making it the fourth largest spender, and just over \$680,000 in the fourth quarter. That level of spending on state advocacy is new for the company, which had previously spent only \$100,000 lobbying the state government since 2005.

So why the big lobbying push? McDonalds, along with other fast food chains, fought hard against a fast food council created by [AB 257](#) in 2022 charged with setting workplace standards. The industry successfully got a referendum on the ballot for this year to repeal the law, but a compromise was reached with [AB 1228](#), which [modified the jurisdiction of the council](#), and the industry [agreed to pull the referendum off the ballot](#).

#5: Pacificorp

Pacificorp — a power company that has customers in California, Oregon and Washington — spent \$2 million in the fourth quarter and more than \$5 million in total for 2023, making it the fifth largest spender for the year. The company lobbied the Public Utilities Commission throughout the year on several issues, including rates and [an application](#) to construct a substation in Shasta County that was originally submitted nearly a decade ago. The subsidiary of Berkshire-Hathaway is no stranger to Sacramento and reported nearly \$15 million spent on lobbying in the state in the last decade and a half.

BERKSHIRE HATHAWAY ENERGY AND SUBSIDIARIES CAL ENERGY, LLC AND BHE RENEWABLES 2023: \$135,000 4Q \$22,500

#6: SEIU

The SEIU State Council, which represents workers including public employees, spent \$3.9 million total last year and \$638,000 in just the fourth quarter, making it the sixth largest lobbyist employer for the year. But just because the council didn't spend much last quarter doesn't mean it never does. Since January 2005, the group has dropped more than \$73 million on hired advocates.

#7: Energy Foundation

Next up is the Energy Foundation, which spent \$4.3 million in total last year on lobbyists but a relatively paltry \$280,000 in the fourth quarter. The San Francisco-based nonprofit gives grants for clean energy projects and tried to influence the Air Resources Board's implementation of "clean fleet" regulations.

#8: Waymo

The eighth biggest spender, Waymo, a subsidiary of Alphabet which also owns Google, paid \$3.8 million for lobbying efforts, nearly \$1.9 million just in the last quarter of the year. The "robotaxi" company reported trying to persuade the Legislature on [a bill](#) that would have required human back-up truck drivers. The bill was ultimately [vetoed by Gov. Newsom](#). Two months later, the company contributed \$9,500 to the governor's campaign committee supporting [Proposition 1](#), the mental health measure on

the March 5 ballot. In 2022, Waymo contributed \$5,000 to Newsom's re-election campaign but has made no other state campaign contributions.

#9: California Hospital Association

The California Hospital Association, a trade group that represents more than 400 hospitals and health care systems, spent more than \$3.5 million on lobbying last year, nearly \$600,000 of which was spent in the final three months. It might be ninth on this year's spending list, but the association has reported spending more than \$57 million since 2005, making it the seventh largest buyer of advocacy services during that period.

The trade group lobbied the Legislature on 17 bills, most related to health care workers and hospital regulations. This includes fighting the Climate Corporate Data Accountability Act, a [new law](#) that requires companies with revenues exceeding \$1 billion to disclose their greenhouse gas emissions.

#10: California Chamber of Commerce

The California Chamber of Commerce closed out the top ten lobbying spenders from last year. The business-boosting group reported trying to influence more than 150 bills, at a cost of more than \$3.4 million during the year, with about a third of that, nearly \$1.2 million, billed during the last quarter. The chamber has spent nearly \$60 million on sweet-talking the state since 2005.

Honorable mention: utilities

Pacificorp wasn't the only utility trying to influence state officials. In fact, four of the major utility companies operating in California spent some scratch on selling their point of view.

Pacific Gas and Electric, which supplies power to most of Northern California, reported spending more than \$1.2 million on lobbying in the fourth quarter, and \$3.1 million total in 2023. The utility has been the eighth largest lobbyist employer in the state over the last 18 years, spending more than \$36 million on advocacy or an average of \$2.4 million per year.

Last year, PG&E lobbied the Legislature on several bills, including [a failed bill](#) related to electrical and gas service to accessory dwelling units, [the governor's office regarding the Diablo Canyon nuclear power plant](#), and reported advocating before the Air Resources Board, the Energy Commission, and the State Water Resources Control Board, and the Public Utilities Commission.

Sempra, which owns SoCalGas and San Diego Gas & Electric, reported spending more than \$1.5 million in 2023 to influence more than 150 bills. On average, the company has spent \$1.49 million per year since 2005.

And the parent company of Southern California Edison, Edison International, invested \$3 million in lobbying the state during 2023 on hundreds of pieces of regulation. But that is nearly double its yearly average of \$1.7 million since 2005.

Honorable mention: local governments

Finally, local governments [frequently lobby the state](#) to make sure their needs are heard by decision-makers. In fact, 2023 was a record-breaking year for local and regional government spending on lobbyists as well, with more than \$55 million collectively, up from \$53 million the year before.

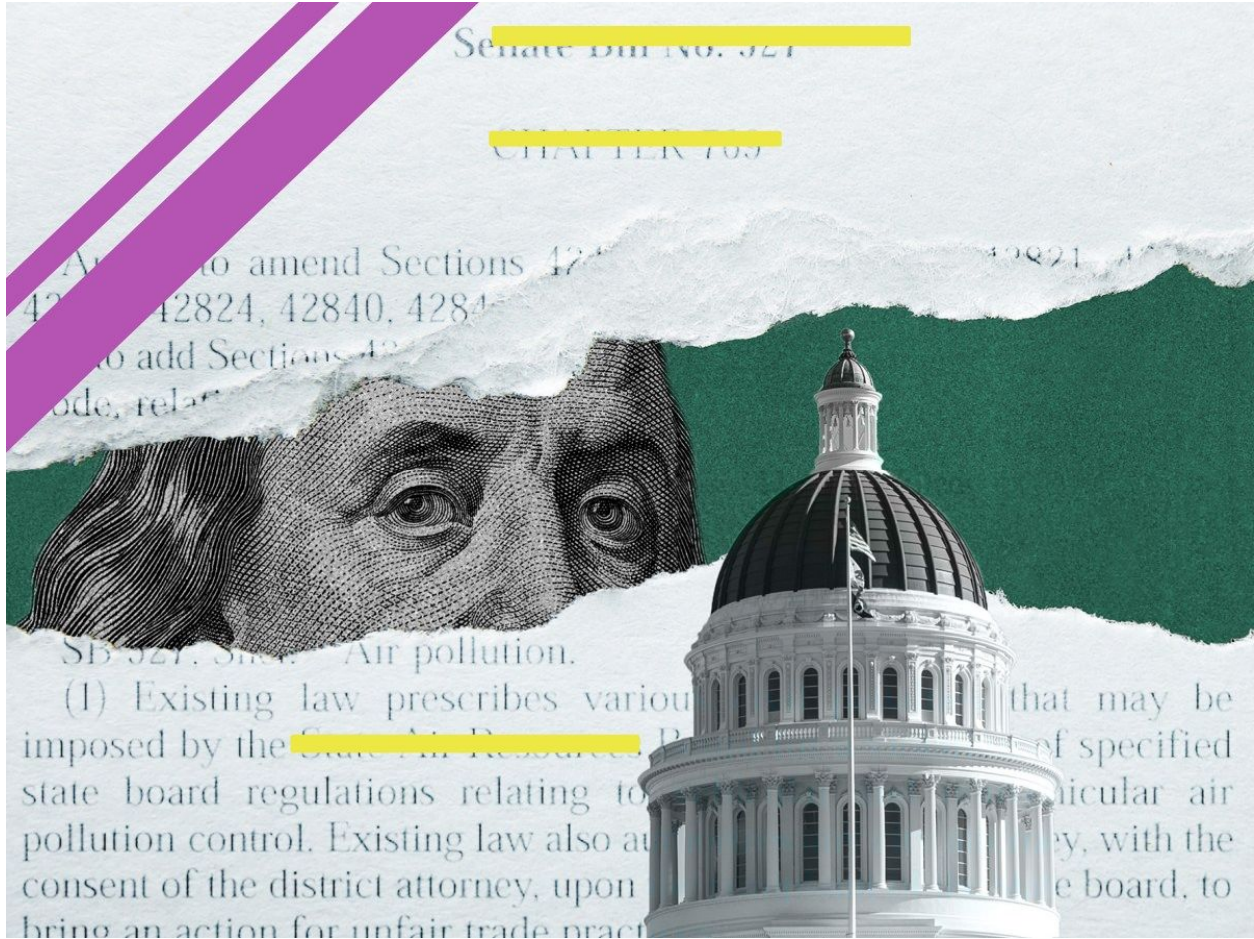
The government entity that spent the most in 2023 was the Metropolitan Water District in Los Angeles which reported just more than \$2.12 million, followed by San Diego County, which put more than \$1.9 million into influence efforts.

Both were outspent by the statewide lobbying group for municipal governments, the League of California Cities, which spent \$2.13 million last year and \$28.4 million over the last 18 years on lobbying the state.

Orange County spent the most of any government entity in the fourth quarter, more than \$682,000 out of an annual bill of \$1.5 million. In just the last quarter, the county reported advocating on property tax legislation as well as trying to influence the state Department of Veterans Affairs regarding a cemetery. In the third quarter, the county attempted to influence 14 different pieces

of legislation on a range of topics, including fentanyl, motel conversions for housing, and the bills that ultimately brought Prop. 1 to March's ballot.

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