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\$12 Million to Help Cuomo Came From Just 20 Donors

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A new group backing Gov. [Andrew M. Cuomo](#) raised more than \$12 million from just 20 donors last year, helping it rapidly become the largest-spending advocacy organization in Albany politics, according to documents released by the group late Friday.

The group, called the Committee to Save New York, was founded at the urging of Mr. Cuomo, a Democrat, and spent millions of dollars supporting the governor's agenda during his first 18 months in office, financing barrages of television and radio advertising that neutralized the well-financed labor unions that have usually dominated the Capitol.

On Friday, the committee released tax returns detailing its spending and membership. Upon request from The New York Times and other news organizations, a spokesman for the committee provided forms detailing contributions to the group in 2011.

Because the committee, organized as a 501(c)4 nonprofit organization, is permitted by law to redact the identities and addresses of its donors, it is not clear exactly which individuals, companies or other nonprofit organizations provided the group's money. But an examination of the filing reveals that of the roughly \$17 million raised, more than two-thirds came from donors giving \$250,000 or more, far in excess of the \$60,800 that New York law permits individuals to give directly to candidates.

While about 74 donors gave to the group, a far smaller number contributed an outsize share of the funds, which were spent to advance core items of Mr. Cuomo's fiscal agenda: reducing state spending, passing a cap on local property taxes, and cutting pension benefits for public employees. A single donor gave the group roughly \$3 million, according to the filings, while two other donors gave \$1.75 million and \$1.5 million.

"This disclosure shows that the small number of New Yorkers who can afford to write massive checks continue to play a disproportionate role in the state's political discourse," said Bill Mahoney, research coordinator for the New York Public Interest Research Group.

About 30 organizations are listed on [the committee's Web site](#) as partners. But the forms released on Friday suggest that the committee is dominated by New York's powerful real estate industry,

long a major source of money for political campaigns.

The group's founding members were Rob Speyer, the president of [Tishman Speyer](#), a leading real estate development company, and two of his employees. A few weeks after the group's founding, the two employees were replaced by Steven Spinola, the head of the Real Estate Board of New York, a business organization for landlords and real estate interests, and Kathryn S. Wylde, who runs the Partnership for New York City, a business group for large companies based in New York, including Tishman and other real estate companies.

Those three people have full control over the group's activities, according to the filings.

The Committee to Save New York spent \$12.1 million supporting Mr. Cuomo's agenda in 2011, with most of that money going toward television and radio advertising, according to lobbying disclosures, which are filed every two months with the state.

The committee was most vocal in advocating passage of Mr. Cuomo's budget proposal and his plan to cap increases in local property taxes.

That outlay was almost twice as much as that of the next biggest spender, a coalition financed by a health workers union, 1199 S.E.I.U., and the Greater New York Hospital Association. And it represented the fifth most expensive single-year lobbying campaign ever undertaken in Albany, according to the New York Public Interest Research Group.