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# Donations to Key Cuomo Ally Show a Rift Among Unions

By **NICHOLAS CONFESSORE**

Backed with millions of dollars in contributions from business, the Committee to Save New York has been Gov. **Andrew M. Cuomo**'s most important ally in his battles with public-sector unions over government spending, pensions and teacher accountability.

But the committee turns out to have another source of money: a group of building trade unions who contributed \$500,000 last year. Their decision to back Mr. Cuomo — and help finance an offensive against their public-sector brethren — illuminates a deepening fissure in the labor movement.

Labor officials said the union contributions to the business group in 2011, which were revealed in records filed with the federal Labor Department and interviews with people familiar with the donations, reflected workers' deep unease about a slowdown in the construction industry in New York and their hope that Mr. Cuomo and the business committee could persuade voters and lawmakers to support publicly financed building projects and encourage growth.

But the unions' aid to the business coalition also shows how battles over government spending, especially at the state level, have deepened longstanding tensions in the labor movement between union members employed by government and those employed by private business.

Public unions are the focus of intense attacks from Republicans, including the wealthy conservative donors whose millions of dollars helped Gov. Scott Walker defeat a labor-backed recall effort in Wisconsin this week. But as states struggle with declining tax revenues, and as gridlock in Washington leaves little prospect for additional federal aid to states, the alliance among Mr. Cuomo, the Committee to Save New York and the private unions reflects a new level of complexity to labor's plight. Even as unions face off against Republican opponents, they are also often at war with a prominent Democratic governor, who has conquered Albany in part by dividing labor in the country's most unionized state.

"I think that any efforts to split the labor movement, whether it's Democrats or Republicans, are unwelcome and not helpful to long-run stability in the state," said Michael Podhorzer, the political director for the A.F.L.-C.I.O. "I think that 'exploit' is the right word," he added. "You could see in the Walker recall that the labor movement remained very unified."

The unions contributing to the Committee to Save New York included the [Mason Tenders' District Council](#), which oversees local laborers' unions in New York City, as well as affiliates of the Laborers Eastern Region, an organization of laborers unions in New York City, New Jersey and Delaware. Gary LaBarbera, president of the Building and Construction Trades Council of Greater New York, sits on the committee's advisory board.

The council joined "because we believed it was important to support the governor's agenda of bringing fiscal responsibility to New York and attracting private investment and job creation to our state," said Paul Fernandes, a spokesman for Mr. LaBarbera.

"It should come as no surprise," he continued, "that we would want to work with other civic and business leaders to support efforts to get our state on sound fiscal and economic footing."

One labor official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the unions' decision, said that unlike public workers, union members in the building trades — electricians, construction workers and plumbers — could not qualify for benefits unless there was private sector work to be had.

"We don't have pension funds if our members are not working," the official said. "We don't have health insurance if our workers are not working."

The construction unions are closely aligned with the real estate industry, which is a major source of donations for the committee and Mr. Cuomo. The committee, which raised \$17 million last year, also received \$2.4 million from gambling interests, including Genting, a company seeking to build a major casino in New York.

"Our leadership has had long relationships with building trades for many, many years," said Michael McKeon, a spokesman for the committee. "And that is fully consistent with the mission of the Committee to Save New York."

Mr. Cuomo's ties to the laborers' union are deep. Maggie Moran, while working as a top official at the regional union, was a senior adviser to his 2010 campaign. She remained an executive at the laborers' union until January, during the period when the unions made their contributions to the Committee to Save New York. Ms. Moran declined to comment on Thursday.

While some unions, including the Civil Service Employees Association, withheld their endorsement of Mr. Cuomo, the Mason Tenders and other trade unions delivered foot soldiers on Election Day. When Mr. Cuomo gave his victory speech on Election Day in 2010, he thanked Ms. Moran and the laborers by name.

Mr. Cuomo has adopted a tough posture, rhetorically and legislatively, toward unions, but has also sought to work with them. Unlike Mr. Walker, in Wisconsin, Mr. Cuomo did not seek to strip

public unions of their collective bargaining rights.

“Our philosophy is that it’s not a question of labor or business interests,” said Richard Bamberger, a Cuomo spokesman. “It’s both or neither.”

Last summer, Mr. Cuomo demanded that New York’s public sector unions, including the largest, the Civil Service Employees Association, accept major wage and benefit concessions as part of a deal to rein in state spending, and he warned of sweeping layoffs if they refused.

In February, Mr. Cuomo used the threat of his emergency budget power to force teachers’ unions to accept a more rigorous system of classroom evaluations. And in March, backed by millions of dollars in advertising from the Committee to Save New York, Mr. Cuomo persuaded lawmakers to cut pensions for future public employees in New York City and across the state, prompting unhappy unions to boycott an annual conference of black and Latino lawmakers.

A person with knowledge of the committee’s deliberations said Mr. LaBarbera had sought to scale back more aggressive advertising attacks that had been under consideration.

Even as Mr. Cuomo and the committee pushed for concessions from public sector unions, they have promoted public works proposals that would benefit members of the construction unions, including significant spending on economic development and infrastructure projects.

In March, Mr. Cuomo announced an agreement on the centerpiece of his jobs program: the New York Works Task Force, with a mandate to raise and invest billions of dollars to rebuild the state’s roads, bridges and parks, and create tens of thousands of jobs. Both union leaders and the Committee to Save New York praised the infrastructure spending.

“It’s worked,” Mr. McKeon said of the committee’s efforts. “The New York Works program is a success.”