

Eergy reports political spending for 2021

By **Brad Cooper** - December 9, 2022



The state's biggest publicly owned utility reported more than \$600,000 in political spending in 2021, spreading money across the political spectrum.

In a report made to its shareholders, Eergy detailed about \$403,000 in political spending for Kansas during the off-election year.

The spending, which is customarily reported by the utility, wasn't targeted to any one political ideology.

It covered a broad range of groups and candidates with various political leanings, including Republican and Democratic affiliated organizations.

"Like most companies, Eergy builds relationships with public office holders where we do business," said Eergy spokesman Andrew Baker.

"We voluntarily disclose all of our contributions annually, consistent with our policy of transparency and best practices in corporate governance regarding political contributions.

The company's [report](#) covers about \$644,000 in total political spending in Missouri and Kansas for 2021. About \$413,000 was spent in Kansas.

By comparison, in 2020 the utility [spent](#) about \$573,000 on politics in Missouri and Kansas. About \$430,000 was spent in Kansas.

Evergy's presence in politics is not unusual since it's dealing with any number of issues at the Kansas statehouse, although the company's report gives a flavor for how the company is spending its money in ways that aren't always visible to the public.

The company, for instance, gave about \$100,000 to the Democratically-aligned Kansas Values Institute, a social welfare group not required to disclose its donors.

Kansas Values spent about \$18.4 million in broadcast advertising alone to help Democratic Gov. Laura Kelly defeat Republican Attorney General Derek Schmidt.

On the other side, Evergy gave \$50,000 to the John Brown Freedom Fund, which spent about \$375,000 in broadcast advertising to help elect Schmidt.

The John Brown Freedom Fund is also a 501(c)(4) nonprofit social welfare group that doesn't have to disclose its donors.

Republican political consultant Pat Leopold was the group's spokesperson and incorporated the organization in 2021.

The John Brown group ran an ad that criticized Kelly for having a record that "stinks" and featured farm animals [leaving behind their droppings](#).

The company also gave another \$75,000 to a group called the [Liberty First Project](#), which records show was incorporated by Michelle Schroeder, the Senate president's chief of staff.

Schroeder is the president of the group and political consultant Jared Suhn is the vice chair, records show.

Another \$75,000 went to the [Right Way Action Fund Inc.](#), which was incorporated by H.J. Swender, an associate of western Kansas industrialist Cecil O'Brate.

It also gave \$50,000 to the Lift Up Kansas political action committee.

The Lift Up PAC was [started](#) in 2019 by Matthew Billingsley of Topeka, who once served as the chief of staff to former Revenue Secretary Sam Williams during former Gov. Sam Brownback's administration.

The Lift Up PAC raised raised about \$365,000 this year and [spent money backing](#) a number of Republican House candidates, including state Reps. Chris Croft of Overland Park, Carl Turner of Leawood, Owen Donohoe of Shawnee, Barbara Wasinger of Hays and Charlotte Esau of Olathe, Mike Dodson of Manhattan and Jesse Borjon of Topeka.

The utility company also gave \$25,000 to [Future Vision Inc.](#), another nonprofit group that was [involved in Senate primary races in 2022](#) where moderate Republicans unsuccessfully

fought challenges from conservatives.

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