

Sheldon Adelson's Spider Web

Where special interests intersect with immigration

BY PETER GEMMA

Sheldon Adelson is the 10th richest person in the world — some say the eighth, but why quibble about a few billion dollars. Undoubtedly, he's among the one percent of the one percent of America's political elites. The Center for Responsive Politics reports that during the 2012 elections, Adelson gave \$20 million to Winning Our Future, the super PAC that promoted Newt Gingrich's presidential bid, then poured \$30 million into the Restore Our Future, one of the super PACs supporting former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney. He also underwrote GOP operative Karl Rove's political operation to the tune of \$23 million. All told, Adelson and his wife invested \$100 million in the 2012 campaign sweepstakes, more money for one election than anyone else in American history.¹

James Rainey of the *Los Angeles Times* writes, "Casino mogul and Republican mega-donor Sheldon Adelson is pro-choice on abortion, in favor of eventual citizenship for undocumented immigrants, supportive of 'socialized' healthcare — that makes him sound like America's most committed liberal."² He really isn't, however.

Sheldon Adelson is simply a man of special interests. Very special interests. First and foremost there is his devotion to Israel. No one has given as much money or lent as much political capital to Israel. That cause is followed by issues mainly impacting his business, such as regulations dealing with gaming casinos and immigration "reform"— ensuring cheap labor for his Las Vegas properties.

It's hard to total up his pro-Israel philanthropic largesse: in 2007, he established the Adelson Family Charitable Trust, which donated \$200 million to Jewish and Israeli causes including Tel Aviv's Yad Vashem Museum

and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Perusing the Internet finds several more recent investments: \$180 million for a youth exchange program, \$67 million to a medical research center, \$50 million to expand an education campus, and a \$16 million gift given towards Israel's attempt to land a spacecraft on the moon.

When it comes to cornering and protecting the gambling market, Adelson has no peer: he made more money in the last three years than any other American. His Las Vegas Sands Corporation is the largest casino company in the world, with annual revenues of more than \$11 billion — it's been estimated that his world-wide gaming interests earn him \$1 million an hour.

To fight off new attempts to open gambling to Internet usage, Adelson has just sketched out a comprehensive campaign utilizing everything from slick media ads to high-priced lobbyists. We'll soon be hearing a lot about how Web-based gambling lures children into a dark world, empowers criminal activity, and will produce little revenue for the states. Adelson doesn't like to lose. He describes himself to professional competitors and political challengers this way: "I didn't go to business school. The name of my game is to eat the other guy's lunch."

Sheldon Adelson approaches the immigration "reform" issue with the same aggressiveness. He says that, "As a Republican, it's my view that efforts to complete immigration reform should be led by our party," and he dismisses those who have concerns about the invasion of illegal aliens as, "on the outer fringes."³

Apparently he believes the Heritage Foundation, a moderate GOP-leaning think tank, is on the periphery. The research organization published a study on the impact of amnesty on the American economy, which found that:

The typical unlawful immigrant is 34 years old. After amnesty, this individual will receive government benefits, on average, for 50 years ... the average adult unlawful immigrant would receive \$592,000 more in government benefits over the course of his remaining lifetime than he would pay in taxes. The former

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unlawful immigrants together would receive \$9.4 trillion in government benefits and services and pay \$3.1 trillion in taxes. They would generate a lifetime fiscal deficit (total benefits minus total taxes) of \$6.3 trillion.⁴

However, Adelson claims his activities on behalf of illegal aliens are driven by family sentimentality as he invokes the Emma Lazarus poem: “generations of immigrants, including my parents, to the United States [read] as they pass the Statue of Liberty ... ‘Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.’”⁵

In a December 2012 interview with *The Wall Street Journal*, Adelson stated: “We’ve got to find a way, find a route for those people to get legal citizenship.”⁶ And to find a way, Adelson has at his disposal deep pockets and a deeply entrenched political advocacy syndicate.

Sheldon Adelson chairs the Republican Jewish Coalition (RJC), an extraordinarily powerful special interest group. The RJC’s board of directors includes four former national finance chairs for the Republican Party, private-equity executive Lewis Eisenberg, former Republican Party National Chairman Ken Mehlman, former U.S. Ambassadors Sam Fox and Mel Sembler, and hedge fund founder Paul Singer. According to *Politico*, “Republican mega-bundler Paul Singer has quietly gotten involved in the fight for immigration reform, making a six-figure donation to a group [the George Soros-funded National Immigration Forum] involved in marshaling conservatives to support an overhaul of federal laws.”⁷

In 2012, Matt Brooks, the Republican Jewish Coalition’s executive director, pitched 100 members for coalition-funded ads opposing President Barack Obama’s policies. He told the faithful that their contributions would not be publicly disclosed because the RJC is

an IRS-designated social welfare nonprofit — known as a 501(c)(4) — which “educates the public” on its special interests. Brooks declared, “We don’t make our donors’ names available. We can take corporate money, personal money, cash, shekels, whatever you got.” Brooks also assures backers, “Everything we do is strictly within the legal guidelines.”⁸ (Adelson once joked that he couldn’t give a \$50 million contribution to the RJC because they didn’t have change for \$1 billion.)

Adelson’s Republican Jewish Coalition is a cabal working to re-shape the GOP into a more “moderate” political party, with a soft center on issues dealing with immigration. William Daroff, the Washington director of the Jewish Federations of North America and a former deputy to Brooks at the Republican Jewish Coalition, observes that Republican Jews want the party to be more moderate. “The conventional wisdom is that the election will result in the shift of the Republican Party to the center,” he says, “particularly on issues of immigration.”⁹

Former Nixon aide Fred Malek, a major GOP donor and fundraiser for the party and an RJC board member, claims, “Thoughtful people in the donor community fully recognize that our Republican Party is seen by many as intolerant, and that we will never again win a national election unless we embrace policies more appealing to the large, growing, and influential group of Hispanics in our country.”¹⁰

Although the identities of individuals and corporations who donate to 501(c)(4) groups such as Adelson’s RJC are not known, the forms filed by nonprofits that give to the groups require them to list the grants to governmental agencies. So here’s where connecting the dots, or dollar signs, reveals how Washington’s political power structure works.

Former Senator Norm Coleman (R-MN) is a consultant and strategic adviser for the Republican Jewish



Coalition. *Breitbart News* reports¹¹ that the American Action Network (AAN), a group headed by Coleman, used faulty economic data, initially published by the White House, to argue a Senate immigration “reform” bill actually creates jobs.¹² In 2010, the Republican Jewish Coalition gave \$4 million to AAN, which, coincidentally, shares office space in Washington, D.C. with Crossroads GPS, political hit man Karl Rove’s outfit.

If you are still following the money trail, we’ve now come to Karl Rove, the political grandmeister of Republicans. Remember, Sheldon Adelson gave a whopping \$23 million to Rove’s Crossroads GPS fund to underwrite GOP campaigns in 2012 — many of which weren’t necessarily the traditional Republican candidates. In fact, Matt Kibbe, President of FreedomWorks, a Tea Party-linked nonprofit that spent more than \$60 million in the 2012 cycle, says there “is a little bit like gang warfare right now” between the establishment pro-amnesty Republicans and the grassroots Tea Party movement. A sore spot in the push-and-pull contest is the issue of immigration. One news report stated:

Karl Rove has founded a new group designed not to beat Democrats, but to destroy a wing of his own coalition: the Tea Party. [It will] pump big money into local congressional primaries and prevent Tea Party-endorsed candidates from scoring Senate nominations.¹³

Last year, Rove’s group tested a campaign ad in support of comprehensive immigration “reform” to the tune of \$100,000. “It is important that Republicans avoid calling a pathway to citizenship ‘amnesty,’” Rove warned in a *Wall Street Journal* editorial, maintaining that, “immigration reform is now a gateway issue: many Hispanics won’t be open to Republicans until it is resolved.”¹⁴

Sheldon Adelson has some favorite politicians, and the list begins, understandably, with Senator Lindsey Graham (R-SC). Adelson and his wife Miriam each gave \$7,800 contributions to Graham’s campaign committee (both were refunded \$2,600 of that, as the total exceeded federal limits).

Graham is fully on board with the open borders lobby:

If we don’t pass immigration reform, if we don’t get it off the table in a reasonable, practical way, it doesn’t matter who you run in 2016. I want to get re-attached to the Hispanic community, to sell conservatism, pass comprehensive immigration reform and grow this party. The Hispanic community is close to our values but we have driven them away over this issue.¹⁵

Coincidentally Graham now leads Senate action for a ban on Internet gambling. And one other fortuitous link with Adelson: when Senator Graham addressed the

annual convention of the most powerful lobby on Capitol Hill,¹⁶ the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, he declared that Israel is “our best friend in the world.”

Adelson is now sizing up GOP potential presidential contenders for the 2016 election cycle. Despite Florida Senator Marco Rubio’s flip-flopping on the immigration issue,¹⁷ Adelson thinks he “is a very impressive guy. I’ve talked to him privately many times, and he’s extremely knowledgeable.”¹⁸

Last year, Adelson presented the annual “Adelson Defender of Israel” award to Mike Huckabee at a Zionist Organization of America dinner. He said the former Arkansas Governor was “a great politician, a great person, a great American, and a great Zionist.” Pundit Michelle Malkin has a different take on Huckabee: “He’s an open borders drag queen, and he’s piling on the make-up and jewels again to disguise his pro-illegal immigration record in time for the [2016] South Carolina [presidential] primary.”

Shawn Steel, a Republican National Committee member, calls Adelson “a very rational guy” who has learned his lesson from 2012. He believes the Adelson strategy for 2016 is, “to have the guy or the gal who’s most likely to put a coalition together to win in November.” Steel explains, “The candidate will have to have a strong résumé — no sudden lightning-new guy — will have to build a formidable fundraising apparatus, and really be emotionally tethered to bringing in middle-class Latinos, Asian Pacifics, Jews, and blacks like never before.”¹⁹

Ken Mehlman, former Republican National Chairman and a board member of Sheldon Adelson’s Republican Jewish Coalition, co-authored a *Wall Street Journal* editorial with former Florida Governor Jeb Bush, a likely Republican presidential candidate (and who was recently fêted in Las Vegas by Adelson). The Bush-Mehlman article concluded that, “Both of us have spent much of our professional lives working to help build the Republican Party. We believe Hispanic Americans are natural Republicans.”²⁰

Others disagree. Dr. Stephen Steinlight of the Center for Immigration Studies asserts, “Republicans seem incapable of learning immigration isn’t decisive. Hispanic hostility to the GOP reflects an unbridgeable divide over economic policy and the role of government. Hispanics are anti-capitalist and want a bigger federal government dispensing larger entitlement. These views are anathema to Republicans, and compromise is impossible.” Steinlight also believes, “Amnesty will have brutal consequences for the most vulnerable Americans. Cheap immigrant labor is a bargain only for employers.”²¹ Adelson’s Las Vegas operations thrive on cheap labor.

Columnist Ann Coulter has cited Adelson as “an especially telling example of the self-interest businessmen on immigration.” She writes:

His newspaper, *Israel Today*, has trumpeted the success of the 15-foot razor-wire fence along Israel's 140-mile border with Egypt, triumphantly noting last August that, for the first time, 'no infiltrations were recorded from the Egyptian border, compared to 193 from the same month last year.' Adelson himself had suggested just such a policy to the *Los Angeles Times* last year, saying he wanted to 'Put a big fence around our country.' By 'our country,' he, of course, meant Israel. In America, he wants illegal immigrants pouring across the border to provide him with an endless supply of cheap labor.²²

Sheldon Adelson is a mean political card shark. Last December, he told the *Wall Street Journal* he was ready to double his 2012 bet of \$100 million on presidential candidates. "I'll spend that much and more. Let's cut any ambiguity."²³

Thankfully, Adelson's luck runs out (think President Mitt Romney or President Newt Gingrich). More recently veteran political pundit Phyllis Schlafly notes, "The stunning defeat of the heir apparent for leadership of the Republican Party, Eric Cantor, continues to reverberate throughout the political world. Completely caught off-guard, the liberal media are scrambling to try to spin the story as something other than what it obviously is. The message of the voters to Cantor and the entire nation was this: no amnesty."²⁴

Sheldon Adelson is in for the whole game, however. He told the *Wall Street Journal*: "I don't cry when I lose, there's always a new hand coming up." ■

Endnotes

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