

The Boston Globe

Lack of PACs a plus for Khazei

Globe Editorial

October 30, 2009

IN A US Senate race with few issue differences, special interest money has become a point of differentiation among the candidates. And Steve Pagliuca and Alan Khazei's willingness to forgo PAC money sets them apart - especially Khazei, who lacks a fortune to fall back on.

US Representative Michael Capuano garnered some unwelcome publicity for having accepted thousands of dollars from a now disbanded Washington lobbying firm that is subject of a federal pay-to-play investigation. In March, his campaign committee donated to charity \$64,500 in contributions tied to that firm, PMA Group. But as the Globe reported Sunday, Capuano's leadership PAC, or political action committee, has also taken \$47,500 from PMA Group. That money will be donated to charity as well, his campaign says.

Capuano is hardly unique in his acceptance of PMA Group dollars. The firm, which was in the business of securing congressional appropriation earmarks for clients, gave to many members of Congress. Still, Capuano would look better if he had forsworn those dollars from the start rather than returning them after controversy erupted.

Meanwhile, Capuano and Attorney General Martha Coakley are both accepting donations from PACs and lobbyists as they campaign for the Senate. Capuano has garnered \$59,500 in PAC money and at least \$24,000 from lobbyists through September, while Coakley has corralled \$57,250 from PACs and at least \$9,900 from lobbyists.

PAC and lobbyist contributions may not determine a candidate's position on an issue, but they certainly help organizations in their efforts to get access and be heard. The public understands that, which is why City Year cofounder Khazei and businessman Pagliuca have made it a point of pride that they aren't taking PAC money.

But they don't deserve equal shares of praise. With an estimated net worth of \$400 million, Pagliuca was always going to run a mostly self-financed campaign. He's trying to make a virtue of his personal advantage.

Khazei, by contrast, doesn't command vast riches, so his pledge to forswear PAC money represents a much bigger sacrifice. So award him more credit for waging a campaign free of special interest money.

Paid for by Citizens for Alan Khazei.

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