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## Even After Right-to-Work, Unions Still Big Political Spenders in Michigan

By Morgan Shields

### Summary

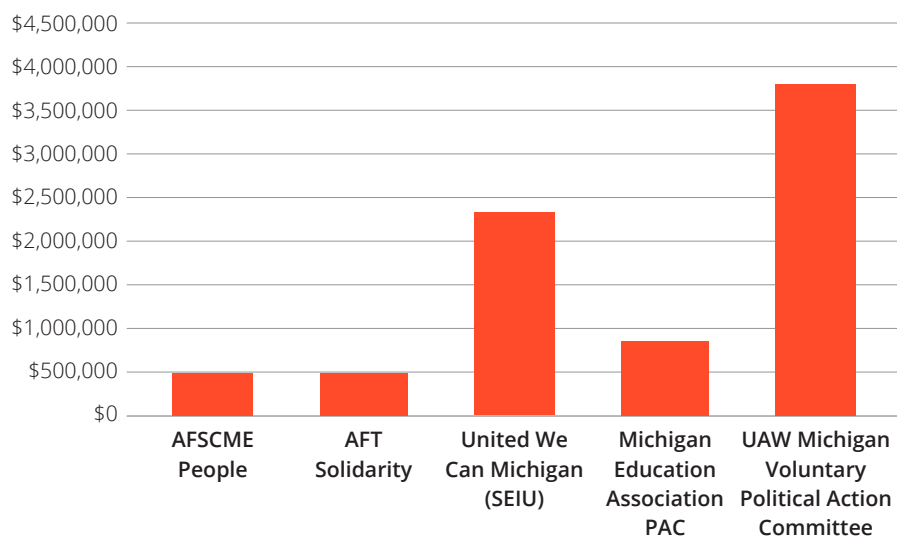
Even with right-to-work, labor unions in Michigan bring substantial financial resources to political campaigns.

Main text word count: 376

Unions and their affiliated political action committees continue to be big players in Michigan elections, spending a lot of money to influence candidate and ballot outcomes. The 2018 elections were no exception.

Here are just a few examples of state and national union spending in Michigan during the last election cycle. This data comes from state and federal campaign spending reports.

### Select Union PAC Spending, 2018 Michigan Elections



**Expenditures** (includes independent expenditures where applicable)  
Source: Michigan Secretary of State finance reports, January 2019

The SEIU's affiliated super PAC, United We Can, made almost \$1.3 million in independent expenditures from Jan. 1, 2017, to Nov. 26, 2018. It also disbursed \$1.8 million to a separate super PAC, United We Can Michigan, which spent a total of \$2.3 million. United We Can Michigan spent a large sum of money to support Democratic Gov. Gretchen Whitmer and oppose Republican candidate Bill Schuette, spending \$960,839.34 for canvassing efforts for the former and \$705,838.35 on canvassing to oppose the latter. It also spent \$145,300 in advertisements to support Gov. Whitmer.

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Unions spent millions on political races in Michigan in the 2018 election cycle.

AFSCME, another of Michigan's largest unions, spent almost \$500,000 in the state, \$34,000 of which went directly to Gov. Whitmer's campaign. Most of the rest, \$250,000, went to the Michigan Democratic State Central Committee.

The Michigan Education Association PAC gave \$10,000 to Abdul El-Sayed's campaign for governor and \$33,750 to Gov. Whitmer's campaign. It made over \$870,000 in expenditures during 2018. Included in that sum were donations of \$67,500 to the Michigan Democratic Party, \$20,000 to the Michigan Senate Democratic Fund and \$20,000 to the Michigan House Democratic Fund. The MEA contributed to state Senate campaigns, state House campaigns, local elections, school board elections, state board of regent races and judicial elections.

The UAW's political action committee spent over \$3.8 million on the 2018 elections. Included in this amount was \$200,000 to the Michigan Democratic Party and \$68,000 to Gov. Whitmer's campaign.

The SEIU Michigan State Council made a \$25,000 contribution to Gov. Whitmer's campaign.

While most of Michigan's largest unions have lost a significant amount of their membership, and with it, revenue, organized labor is still a major political spender in the state and nationally. Unlike workers in past election cycles, however, today's workers have a choice in union membership and fees. Workers who don't like how a union is spending its time or their money can choose to withdraw from it.

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**Morgan Shields is the director of Workers for Opportunity at the Mackinac Center for Public Policy**, a research and educational institute headquartered in Midland, Michigan. Permission to reprint in whole or in part is hereby granted, provided that the author and the Mackinac Center are properly cited.

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