

Philanthropist Says His Political Gifts Help to Bolster His Charitable Mission

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Jon L. Stryker, heir to a medical-technology fortune and president of the Arcus Foundation, no longer keeps an office in the grant maker's headquarters in his hometown of Kalamazoo, Mich.

Instead, he works in a brick building across the street, he says, because he has been spending more time lately on political activities, something he can't do on foundation time. Grant makers are required by federal law to avoid partisan campaign efforts.

Over the past few years, Mr. Stryker has channeled \$14-million of his \$2-billion net worth into political campaigns and groups that seek to elect Democratic lawmakers and promote social justice, including combating antigay legislation.

Mr. Stryker says he believes those contributions bolster the work of the foundation, which supports gay rights along with its conservation mission.

"We could spend all of our funds on something like AIDS services, for instance, or I could work to try to get people in office who will get the government to do the right thing and provide the services," he says. "There definitely is a complementary component to doing philanthropy and politics."

Support for Democrats

Approximately \$8-million of Mr. Stryker's political giving has gone to his home state. In 2006, he created a political-action committee, the Michigan Coalition for Progress, which has received \$6-million of that sum.

His contributions have helped produce results for Democratic candidates.

In 2006, Democrats gained a majority in the Michigan House of Representatives for the first time in a decade.

Gov. Jennifer Granholm was also re-elected, beating out her Republican opponent, Dick DeVos, who was the target of negative advertising paid for by Mr. Stryker's political-action committee.

Aaron Dorfman, executive director of the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, in Washington, says that philanthropists are wise to attempt to advance change through both the charitable and political arenas.

"It's a smart way to use all the tools at your disposal to achieve the vision of the world that you want to see," he says. "What's important is that people don't abuse their foundations and other tax-exempt entities, but as long as they don't, I think it's a smart strategy."

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