

*Spirit of
Democracy*

SPECIAL REPORT

ANATOMY OF A POLITICAL **SMEAR**

The story of how Sacramento's most powerful special interest punished a Democrat who dared challenge their agenda.

Watch the documentary video at
www.AnatomyofaSmear.com

Steve Glazer



A local East Bay story

This special report “Anatomy of a Smear” is being distributed to California newspapers and editorial boards as well as to voters in your community. You may also download a print version at www.AnatomyofaSmear.com to share with others who may want to read this important story.

Reform of Sacramento’s broken politics is ultimately in your hands – *the voters*.



“This story has little to do with policy. It’s all about lessons, settling scores and the perils of confronting power in this town.”

*– Sacramento Bee columnist Dan Morain,
on the campaign for California’s 16th Assembly District*

This report references independent news reports and public records to tell this important story of how Sacramento’s culture of special interest politics works to punish independent thinkers and kill reform.

Sources

1. California Fair Political Practices Commission report: Big Money Talks, March 2010
2. San Francisco Chronicle, editorial. April 30, 2014
3. Contra Costa Times, “Barnidge: Big Tobacco, blatant distortions and mudslinging in Assembly District 16.” May 18, 2014
4. Sacramento Bee, “Morain: Steve Glazer learns what it means to be blackballed by organized labor.” April 27, 2014
5. San Francisco Chronicle, “Mud getting slung across Bay Area ahead of primary election.” May 31, 2014
6. Capitol Weekly, “Labor took aim at Glazer – and fired.” June 6, 2014
7. San Francisco Chronicle, “Democrat Steve Glazer risks union backlash.” October 18, 2013
8. Wall Street Journal, “The Trials of a Democratic Reformer.” August 31, 2012
9. CNN, “California bill on teachers accused of sex crimes fails.” August 27, 2012
10. Calbuzz blog, “Top-Two Politics: Biz Plots, Back Stories & Backbiting.” May 15, 2013
11. NBC Bay Area, “Joe Mathews: Gloria Romero’s Revenge.” August 15, 2012
12. California Secretary of State official campaign finance records
13. www.maplight.org
14. San Francisco Chronicle, Matier and Ross, September 28, 2013
15. Contra Costa Times editorial, June 4, 2014

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|-------------|
| Sacramento’s most powerful special interests..... | 1-2 |
| Crush reform – by ‘bulldozing’ reformers..... | 3-4 |
| Steve Glazer’s positions challenge labor unions..... | 5-6 |
| Anatomy of a smear | 7-8 |
| The “perils of confronting power” | 9-10 |

“WE’RE READY, WILLING, AND ABLE TO SPEND MILLIONS — YOU DON’T WANT TO FIGHT US.”

1

SACRAMENTO’S MOST POWERFUL SPECIAL INTERESTS

The story of Democrat Steve Glazer’s political downfall in the Bay Area’s 16th Assembly district is set not in the Assembly District itself, but in Sacramento, where a few special interest political powerhouses have learned to leverage their tremendous financial resources to influence legislative outcomes through political campaign spending.

In March 2010, California’s Fair Political Practices Commission [FPPC] issued a report documenting the extent to which California’s special interests leverage political spending to dominate the legislative process:

“Special interests spend staggering amounts of money on candidates, ballot measures and lobbying to influence the outcome of governmental decisions in California.

“By spending huge amounts of money, [special interests] send an unmistakable message to political opponents and elected officials alike: ‘We’re ready, willing, and able to spend millions — you don’t want to fight us.’”¹

THE TOP “BIG SPENDER:” THE CALIFORNIA TEACHERS ASSOCIATION.

According to the FPPC’s report, by far the most powerful political interest in terms of spending and Sacramento influence is the California Teachers Association [CTA] – which

Big Money Talks California’s Billion Dollar Club The 15 Special Interests that Spent \$1 Billion to Shape California Government California Fair Political Practices Commission - March 2010 “A handful of special interests have a disproportionate amount of influence on California elections and public policy.”¹ The most political spending: \$211,849,298 by the California Teachers’ Union. – FPPC Report “Big Money Talks

spent a record \$211 million on influencing political outcomes in the last decade alone.¹ This enormous outlay represents over \$100 million more than the next biggest spender – the California State Council of Service Employees.

The full force and power of California’s teachers union’s political campaign arm would be brought to bear against Steve Glazer – not just for his willingness to campaign on positions that ran contrary to labor’s platform, but also for running in a race that included the California Teachers Association’s powerful political chief: Tim Sbranti.

A POLITICAL ENFORCER.

As the chairman of Sacramento’s most powerful political interest, Tim Sbranti enforced the union’s interests through prolific political campaign contributions and spending.

According to Maplight.org, the nonpartisan website which tracks political spending, under Sbranti’s leadership, the California Teachers Association spent \$2,138,700 on campaign contributions – far more than any other special interest during his leadership. Source: www.maplight.org.¹³

Sbranti’s prolific spending on campaigns cemented the California Teachers Association’s reputation for practicing tough, brass-knuckles politics on behalf of its members, rewarding allies and punishing enemies who threatened their legislative agenda.



Tim Sbranti

“Tim Sbranti oversaw the California Teachers Association’s political action committee.”⁴

As NBC Bay Area’s reporter Joe Mathews put it: “California’s public employee unions have long prided themselves on their toughness. If a Democratic politician stepped out of line, they would move to punish that politician.”¹¹

BRASS-KNUCKLE POLITICS: CONTROVERSIAL - BUT EFFECTIVE.

According to nonpartisan observers and news organizations, Sbranti’s approach, while controversial, successfully translated into the ability to pressure Sacramento legislators to fall in line to oppose education reforms that might threaten the union.

The Wall Street Journal reported on Sbranti’s effectiveness in August 2012:

“The [teachers] union has killed or hijacked nearly every reform bill that has popped up in the legislature...This year the unions torpedoed a bill (introduced by Democratic State Sen. Alex Padilla) that would have made it easier for districts to fire teachers who molest students. Same for legislation to strip pensions from teachers who have sexual relationships with students.”⁸

On CNN, Daniel Newman, co-founder and president of the non-partisan political money-tracking website maplight.org also noted the ability of the teachers unions’ hardball tactics to influence political outcomes:

“You can see how the money correlates with the vote. It shows that interest groups that invest in politics buy results.”⁹

“IF A DEMOCRATIC POLITICIAN STEPPED OUT OF LINE, THEY WOULD MOVE TO PUNISH THAT POLITICIAN.”

– NBC Bay Area



“THIS STORY’S PROBABLY GOING TO MAKE YOU MAD.”⁹ – Anderson Cooper, CNN

“IF A DEMOCRATIC POLITICIAN STEPPED OUT OF LINE, THEY WOULD MOVE TO PUNISH THAT POLITICIAN.”¹¹ – NBC Bay Area

www.AnatomyofaSmear.com

2

CRUSH REFORM – BY ‘BULLDOZING’ REFORMERS.

CNN’S COOPER: “THIS STORY’S PROBABLY GOING TO MAKE YOU MAD”

Perhaps the most jarring example of the California Teachers Association’s political muscle during Sbranti’s tenure came in 2012, when the union gained national attention for defeating legislation to expedite the firing process for teachers accused of sexual misconduct towards students.

As CNN’s Anderson Cooper stated in the lead-in to his 2012 report: “This story’s probably going to make you mad.”⁹

CNN’s 2012 report tells the story:

“California state Sen. Alex Padilla drafted a bill this year that would have allowed a faster way for schools to fire teachers accused of the most heinous crimes against children.

“While senators overwhelmingly voted in support of Senate Bill 1530, it was met with strong opposition from the powerful California Teachers Association.

“Four key state legislators torpedoed this plan. The question is whether money from the state’s powerful education unions influenced their actions.”⁹

The answer to Anderson Cooper’s question appears to be “Yes.” According to campaign finance reports filed with the California Secretary of State, the California Teacher’s Association’s political action committee funneled campaign money to the four legislators who killed the sexual misconduct bill.¹²

According to Maplight.org, teachers unions gave 5.4 times as much in campaign contributions to the committee members who voted ‘no’ versus the ones who voted ‘yes.’¹³

“You can see how the money correlates with the vote. It shows interest groups that invest in politics buy results.”⁹

– Daniel Newman, nonpartisan Maplight’s co-founder and president, on CNN.

2014 PREVIEW: “BULLDOZING” REFORMERS

The teachers union didn’t just reward its friends. It also knew how to punish its enemies.

Former State Senator Gloria Romero, now chairwoman of Democrats for Education Reform, was a parental rights advocate who proposed and passed legislation in 2010 that gave parents more input on local school evaluation, performance and management.⁸

This legislation put Romero squarely at odds with Sbranti and the teachers union. As NBC Bay Area reported:

“Gloria Romero tangled with the California Teachers Association.”¹¹

When Romero ran for California’s State Superintendent of Public Instruction – California’s schools chief – her political career was “bulldozed” with millions of dollars of negative ads from the teachers union she had antagonized with her pro-parents legislation. As was reported by the *Wall Street Journal*:

“The unions exacted revenge by bulldozing Ms. Romero’s bid for state superintendent of schools later that year.”⁸

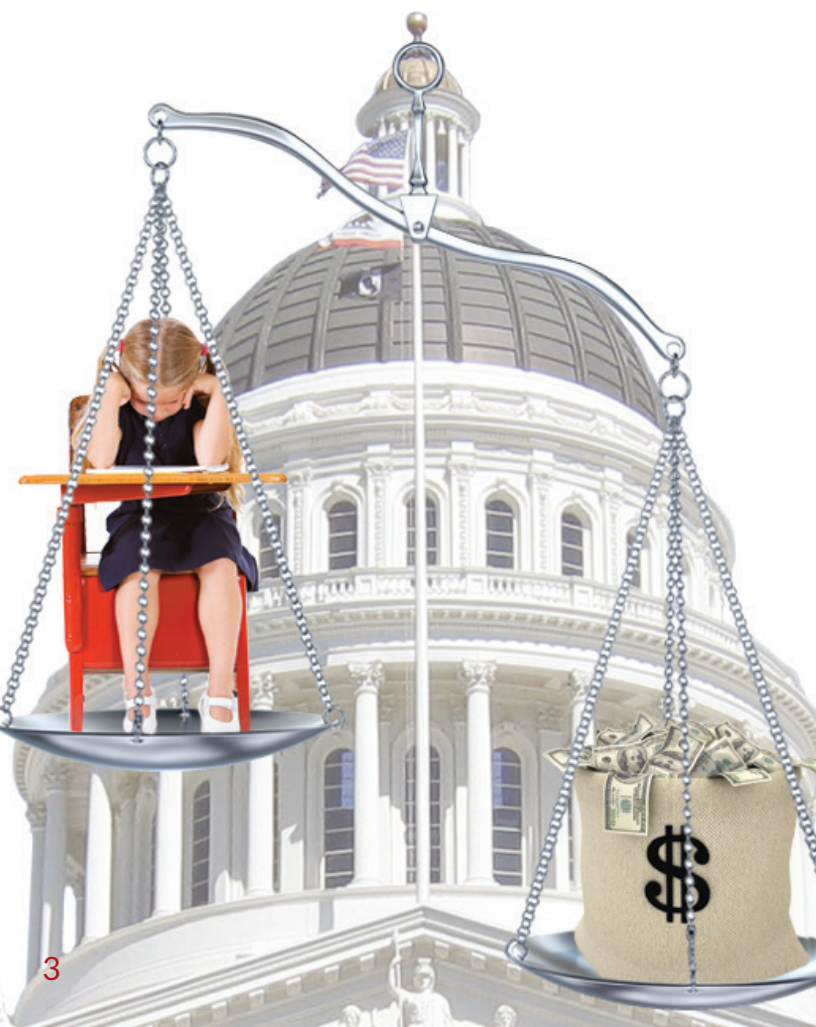
This story of hardball political payback in 2010 would serve as a preview of the 2014 campaign against Democrat Steve Glazer, who like Gloria Romero, offered legislative proposals that threatened the unions’ platform.

“THE UNIONS EXACTED REVENGE BY BULLDOZING MS. ROMERO’S BID FOR STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS LATER THAT YEAR.”⁸

– *Wall Street Journal*



Gloria Romero
Chair, Democrats for Education Reform





“I’M REDEFINING WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A DEMOCRAT”⁷ – Steve Glazer, *San Francisco Chronicle*

“YOU HAVE SEALED THE NAILS ON YOUR COFFIN.”¹⁴
– Union member to Steve Glazer

www.AnatomyofaSmear.com

3 STEVE GLAZER’S POSITIONS CHALLENGE LABOR UNIONS

“I’M REDEFINING WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A DEMOCRAT”

In 2013, Steve Glazer decided to run for the East Bay’s Assembly District 16, being vacated by incumbent Democrat Joan Buchanan. A self-described “independent” Democrat, Glazer advocated reforms on issues that challenged unions, such as opposing BART strikes and backing pension reforms.

“I’m redefining what it means to be a Democrat,” Steve Glazer told the *San Francisco Chronicle*.⁷

As the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported:

“Glazer defines himself as ‘a progressive Democrat who is fiscally conservative’ - supportive of public-pension reform and more business-friendly regulations, and willing to take on labor, ‘the biggest (special) interest in the state.’”⁷

The prominent California political blog Calbuzz reported:

“As a moderate Democratic proponent of pension reform, Glazer poses a threat to certain public employee unions who have shown little willingness to compromise on state pension costs.”¹⁰

“Every union is going to come out against you - you have sealed the nails on your coffin.”¹⁴
BART UNION WORKER to Steve Glazer



Steve Glazer campaigned against BART strikes

“THE NAILS IN HIS COFFIN.”

Steve Glazer’s willingness to challenge labor on pension reforms and opposition to transit strikes brought out ominous personal attacks that foretold of the negative campaign to come.

One episode in particular was reported in the *San Francisco Chronicle*’s ‘Matier and Ross’ column:

“Orinda City Councilman and Democratic state Assembly candidate Steve Glazer got a little more attention than he bargained for the other morning when he was canvassing commuters on the idea of banning public transit workers from striking.

“A little while later, Glazer was having coffee in the nearby Europa Hofbrau when a BART [transit union] worker came up to his table and told him, ‘Every union is going to come out against you - you have sealed the nails on your coffin.’”¹⁴

LABOR PUTS GLAZER ON “CRUSH INTO DUST LIST”

Even more foreboding for Glazer’s showdown with labor were reports that his soon-to-be opponent in the race for Assembly District 16 would be the powerful CTA’s very own political enforcer, Tim Sbranti - also the Mayor of Dublin.

As the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported:

“Glazer’s chief Democratic rival is a labor favorite, Dublin Mayor Tim Sbranti, who heads the California Teachers Association political action committee.”⁷

Not only was Glazer about to take on the political chairman of California’s most powerful special interest, but newspapers also reported that the teachers’ unions had pledged their full political muscle to elect their political chief, Sbranti. The *Sacramento Bee* reported:

“The teachers’ union will spend whatever it takes to defeat Glazer, and elect his foe, Tim Sbranti.”⁴

With Sbranti as their anointed labor candidate, other labor unions followed the same political hardball playbook that Sbranti helped write. They began amassing millions to defeat Glazer and by extension - his proposals. *Capitol Weekly* reported:

“Labor unions launched a costly campaign to keep [Glazer] from advancing to the November general elections.”⁶

Labor put Steve Glazer “on the ‘do-crush-into-dust’ list.”⁴
– *Sacramento Bee* May 9, 2014



One newspaper columnist, the *Sacramento Bee*’s Dan Morain, described the effort more bluntly, writing that Sacramento’s labor unions had put Steve Glazer “on the ‘do-crush-into-dust’ list.”⁴

Steve Glazer had dared cross the unions with his issue positions. Tim Sbranti and the teachers were about to “teach him a lesson” in political hardball.

“WELCOME TO THE WORLD OF MUDSLINGING POLITICS.”

-Contra Costa Times columnist Tom Barnidge

www.AnatomyofaSmear.com

4

THE SMEAR.



SACRAMENTO'S MOST POWERFUL UNIONS TEAM UP TO "PUMMEL" GLAZER

In order to multiply the force of their efforts, the teachers union combined its campaign against Steve Glazer with other anti-Glazer labor efforts under the name "Californians for Economic Prosperity." As the *Sacramento Bee* reported:

"A labor-funded campaign committee called Californians for Economic Prosperity, is pummeling Glazer....Labor has provided \$935,000 and counting to Californians for Economic Prosperity's campaign, including \$500,000 from the California Teachers Association."⁴

The *San Francisco Chronicle* also reported on the massive spending effort against Glazer:

"Organized labor groups already have spent nearly \$1 million to deny the Orinda councilman election to the state Assembly seat that reaches from east of the Berkeley hills to the Tri-Valley."²

THE 'SMEAR': LABOR PORTRAYS STEVE GLAZER AS A MOUND OF CIGARETTE BUTTS.

Labor's goal was clear: defeat Glazer by any means possible, including if necessary a "smear campaign" associating Glazer with tobacco companies.²

The factual problem with that strategy was that the *Sacramento Bee* had documented that Steve Glazer's campaign had received "zero dollars from tobacco companies."⁴

Sbranti's labor backers looked past that fact and attacked Glazer by unleashing thousands of political mailers featuring his head and torso created out of cigarette butts.

Contra Costa Times Columnist Tom Barnidge reported on the labor tactic:

"Maybe the most eye-catching effort is a bit of photo gimmickry that shows Glazer's head peeking out of a torso made entirely of cigarette butts." - *Contra Costa Times*.³

"WELCOME TO THE WORLD OF MUDSLINGING POLITICS"

Observers with news organizations such as the *Contra Costa Times* considered labor's smear attacks against Glazer to be so "outlandish"³ that eventually every major newspaper covering the race issued its own unusually strong rebuke.

The *San Francisco Chronicle* wrote: "The smear campaign against [Glazer] has been as disingenuous as it is disgusting."³



Newspapers condemned labor's portrayal of Glazer as a mound of cigarette butts.

"DISGUSTING"²

San Francisco Chronicle

"BLATANTLY MISLEADING"³

Contra Costa Times

"A SMEAR CAMPAIGN"²

San Francisco Chronicle

"OUTLANDISH CLAIMS"³

Contra Costa Times

"DISINGENUOUS"²

San Francisco Chronicle

"STEEPED IN HYPOCRISY"⁴

Sacramento Bee

The *Contra Costa Times'* Barnidge wrote: Welcome to the world of mudslinging politics, [and] blatantly misleading claims...³

The *Sacramento Bee* wrote: "It's a campaign steeped in hypocrisy."⁴



SBRANTI: "I'M NOT INVOLVED IN ANY WAY"

The hardball attack mailers - "hit pieces" in political parlance - against Glazer were largely funded by the same teachers union committee that Sbranti had chaired just months earlier. And as Glazer's major Democratic opponent, their impact directly benefited Sbranti's campaign.

Sbranti told newspapers he was not involved in any way. As the *Contra Costa Times* reported:

"Sbranti takes no ownership of the hit pieces-- 10 mailers of similar ilk and one TV spot.

"I'm not involved in that in any way," he said. "It's an independent campaign."³

Paid for by Spirit of Democracy California
Not authorized by a candidate or a
committee controlled by a candidate
455 Capitol Mall, Suite 600
Sacramento, CA 95814

PRST STD
US POSTAGE
PAID
MSI

A STORY OF SACRAMENTO'S BROKEN POLITICS...



“This story has little to do with policy. It’s all about lessons, settling scores and the perils of confronting power in this town.”

– *Sacramento Bee* columnist Dan Morain,
on the campaign for California’s 16th Assembly District

Watch the documentary video at
www.AnatomyofaSmear.com