



How eight
elite rich
old ladies
funded
the Gavin
Newsom
political
ascent
and sex
addiction

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Gavin Newsom wasn't born rich, but he was born connected — and those alliances have paid handsome dividends throughout his career.

A coterie of San Francisco's wealthiest families has backed him at every step of his political rise, which in November could lead next to his election as governor of California.

San Francisco society's "first families" — whose names grace museum galleries, charity ball invitations and hospital wards — settled on Newsom, 50, as their favored candidate two decades ago, said **Willie Brown**, former state Assembly speaker and former mayor of the city.



Left: Gavin Newsom in San Francisco one day after winning the mayoral election in 2003. (Robert Durrell / Los Angeles Times) Right: Newsom in San Francisco one day before the 2018 gubernatorial primary. (Al Seib / Los Angeles Times)

"He came from their world, and that's why they embraced him without hesitancy and over and above everybody else," said Brown, who is a mentor to Newsom. "They didn't need to interview him. They knew what he stood for."

A Times review of campaign finance records identified eight of San Francisco's best-known families as being among Newsom's most loyal and long-term contributors. Among those patrons are the Gettys, the Pritzkers and the Fishers, whose families made their

respective fortunes in oil, hotels and fashion. They first backed him when he was a restaurateur and winery owner running for county supervisor in 1998, and have continued their support through the governor's race.

They are not Newsom's largest donors: The families in total have given about \$2 million of the \$61 million that donors have contributed to his campaigns and independent committees backing those bids. But they gave while he was a relative unknown, providing crucial support to a political newcomer in the years before his campaign accounts piled high with cash from labor unions, Hollywood honchos, tech billionaires and donors up and down the state.

Newsom's faithful eight

\$61.5 million

Total donations since 1998

Guggenheimer

Buell

Swig

Marcus

Wilsey & Traina

Fisher

Getty

\$2.2 million

From consistent family donors

Pritzker

Now the families appear poised to see their investments pay off.

These donors are mostly liberal, inspired by Newsom's history as an early supporter of progressive causes, including same-sex marriage as San Francisco mayor in 2004. But some are Republicans, including President Trump's new ambassador to Austria, who are drawn by Newsom's background as a small businessman.

The front-runner's opponents have attacked him for his connections. During the primary, two of his Democratic rivals, Antonio Villaraigosa and John Chiang, painted Newsom as the



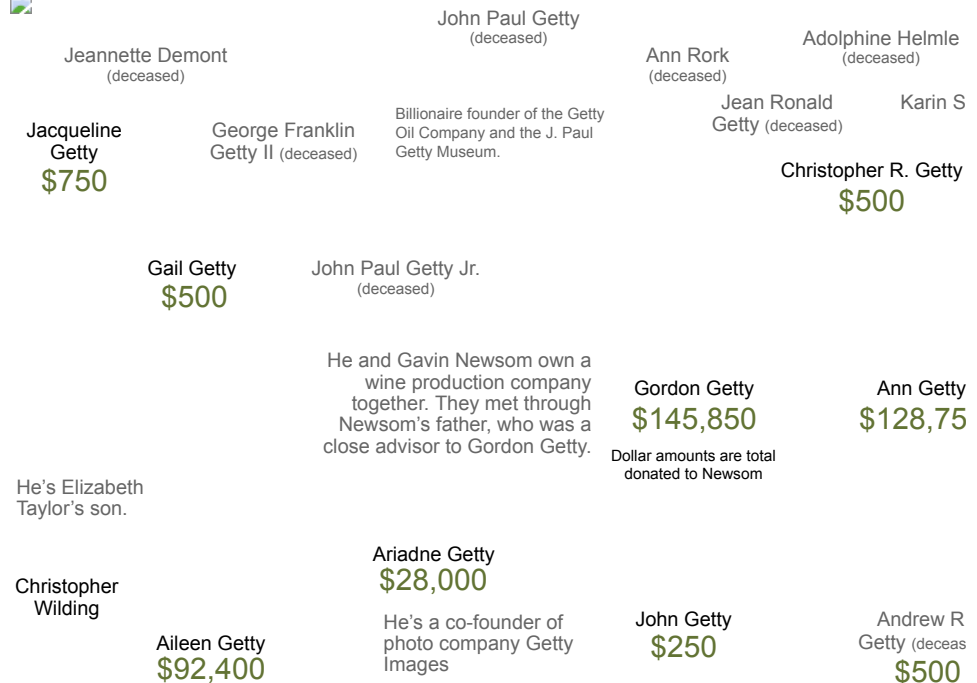
beneficiary of wealth and privilege. John Cox, his GOP opponent in the November election, reiterated the theme in a new website titled “Fortunate \$on.” And an independent expenditure committee supporting the Republican spent a quarter-million dollars late last month on an ad calling Newsom “a child of privilege, his path greased by family and political connections and billionaire patrons.”

Newsom, whose campaign did not respond to a request for comment on this article, has long been tied to San Francisco society.

His father, Bill, was a lifelong friend of Gordon Getty, the son of oil magnate J. Paul Getty — they attended high school together. Bill Newsom later managed the Getty family trust on behalf of Gordon, estimated by Forbes to be worth more than \$2 billion in 2018. Bill Newsom was so close with the family that he helped deliver the ransom money after the 1973 kidnapping of J. Paul Getty’s grandson, John Paul Getty III.

The Gettys

One of the richest families in the United States. You’ve heard of them.



Andrew Wilding \$10,000	Mark Getty	Domitilla Getty \$29,100	Peter Getty \$1,750	Shannon Bavar \$500
Gisela Zacher	J. Paul Getty III (deceased) \$500	Alexander Getty \$28,200	Tatum Getty \$28,225	
He was famously kidnapped and held for ransom when he was a teenager.		She's Gisela's daughter from another relationship and was later adopted by John Paul Getty III.		
Balthazar Getty \$10,500	Anna C. Getty \$15,650			
See all donations +				

During Gov. Jerry Brown's first tenure, he appointed Bill Newsom a judge, and the Newsom family had close ties to Willie Brown, former state lawmaker and California Democratic Party leader John Burton and House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi.

The Gettys' support has played an important role in Gavin Newsom's personal, professional and political life.

He has said he was primarily raised by his mother, who at times struggled to make ends meet. But Gordon and **Ann Getty** viewed him as a son, according to interviews the couple gave to the San Francisco Chronicle and W Magazine, and they provided him with experiences his parents could not afford, including an African safari when he was a teen, Newsom said in an earlier interview with The Times.

"It all goes back to the Gettys as far as Gavin is concerned," said Jerry Roberts, former managing editor of the San Francisco Chronicle and an expert on Bay Area politics.

In addition to helping fund Newsom's early business ventures, the family has been a mainstay as he pursued his political ambitions. Eighteen Gettys — including Gordon, Ann and actor Balthazar Getty — have collectively donated more than a half-million dollars to Newsom's nine campaigns, starting with a total of \$750 to his 1998 campaign for supervisor. Members of the family have spent more than \$362,000 supporting his current gubernatorial bid.

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4. Ta mar mar don.
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A spokesman for the Gettys did not respond to a request for comment.

Through his friendship and business partnership with Gordon and Ann Getty's son **Billy**, Newsom was at the center of the social scene led by the younger generation of San Francisco's wealthy families. Those relationships would form the foundation of his life in politics.



Gordon Getty and Gavin Newsom attend an event benefiting the UCSF Childrens Hospital in 2010. (Drew Altizer)

“These kids had all grown up together, or played sports or gone to school together or later dated,” said Catherine Bigelow, a longtime San Francisco society writer. “In the early '90s [they] didn't want to go to the parties their parents were going to. Billy and Gavin opened a wine shop and restaurant when they took over the Balboa Café, creating this really cool scene.”

This was San Francisco before the tech boom and before social media. The Balboa Café, a Marina standard that Billy Getty and Newsom bought and updated, was described by the New York Times in 1998 as “a glittering nexus for Gen-X San Franciscans with social and political connections.”

That year, Newsom ran his first campaign: a bid to hold on to a county supervisor seat, which then-Mayor Willie Brown had appointed him to fill. At the time, the Chronicle wrote that Brown valued Newsom's “easy familiarity with San Francisco's upper crust.”

One check in 1998 came from **Doris Fisher**, the billionaire clothier who decades earlier founded the Gap in San Francisco with her husband. It was for \$500, the most an individual could give, according to city law.

The Fishers

Doris and Donald Fisher co-founded The Gap.



She's one of California's top individual political donors.

Doris F. Fisher

Donald Fisher
(deceased)

President of the San Francisco Symphony and a


	\$45,550	\$17,250	trustee of Stanford University
Elizabeth Stroud Fisher	Robert J. Fisher	William S. Fisher	Sakurako D. Fisher
\$47,450	\$33,450	\$40,700	\$40,200
Co-founders of the Pisces Foundation, which provides grants to other nonprofits.	John J. Fisher	Laura M. Fisher	He's a trustee emeritus of the Exploratorium in San Francisco.
	\$40,950	\$39,450	
		Has a majority stake in the Oakland Athletics	
See all donations +			

Newsom raised a little more than \$55,000 and won a full term.

Running unopposed for the same seat in 2000, Newsom continued to court influential donors. Billionaire Bay Area real estate broker George Marcus and his wife, Judy, gave \$500 donations to Newsom in 2000. They've given in tandem to his campaigns ever since.

The Marcuses

Billionaire George Marcus is the founder of Marcus & Millichap, one of the largest real estate companies in the country.

			
Previously a member of the Board of Regents of the University of California.	George Marcus	Judith Marcus	Judith and George both attended San Francisco State University in the 1960s and donated \$3 million to open the university's International Center for the Arts.
	\$85,750	\$85,250	
	Mary Jane Marcus		
	\$1,000		
See all donations +			

A few years later, Newsom raised \$4 million in his first mayoral campaign, helped by the same famous families.

The bid drew donations from 15 different members of the Pritzker family, descendants of the founders of the Hyatt Hotel chain. For **Lisa** and husband John Pritzker, who moved away from his Chicago-based family to become a prominent San Francisco investor and philanthropist, the contributions were part of a long

tradition of giving to Newsom. A spokesperson for John and Lisa Pritzker said they were unavailable for comment.

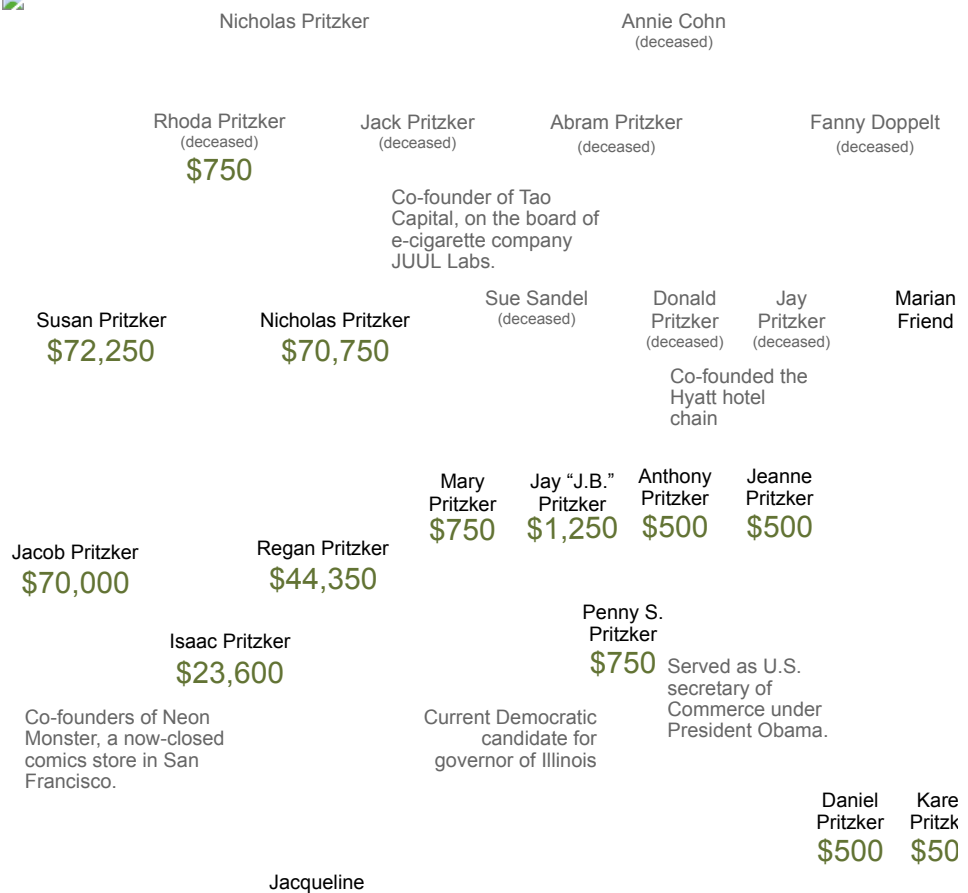


Top: Gavin Newsom and Lisa Pritzker attend the 2010 Modern Ball at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Le Pritzker, John Pritzker, Elizabeth Stroud Fisher and Robert Fisher attend the SFMOMA Contemporary Vision Award Altizer) Right: Judith Marcus (left) and George Marcus (second left) attend Bernini's Medusa opening party at the De Museum in 2011. (Claudine Gossett / Drew Altizer Photography)

The money went toward a flood of last-minute phone calls and mailers in a race that polls deemed too close to call on election day. Newsom, then 36, defeated fellow Supervisor Matt Gonzalez by a slim margin to become the city's youngest mayor in a century. Soon after he was sworn in, he drew national headlines by ordering the city to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples.

The Pritzkers

One of the wealthiest families in the United States, prominent in politics and philanthropy in San Francisco and Chicago.



Pritzker
\$70,000

Pritzker
\$13,600

Lisa Pritzker
\$141,975

John A. Pritzker
\$94,650

Thomas J.
Pritzker
\$750

Margot L.
Pritzker
\$750

San Francisco philanthropists who have made sizable donations to the UC San Francisco Benioff Children's Hospital and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

[See all donations +](#)

More than a dozen members of the Swig family also cut checks to Newsom during his first mayoral campaign. The family ran the iconic Fairmont Hotel, which was built atop the city's Nob Hill in the 1930s, then expanded from a single luxury hotel into a worldwide chain.

Rick Swig, 67, said Newsom made a point of paying respect to the families who are the spine of San Francisco's history, society and culture, what he called "the city's DNA."

"That's important recognition that I think that we who have been born into those families find important," said Swig, who has donated more than \$30,000 to Newsom's campaigns.



The Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco. (Kim Komenich / San Francisco Chronicle)

As the leader of San Francisco's tourism bureau, Swig tangled with Newsom as mayor. Putting aside their differences, Swig said, they reached an agreement about tourism spending that ultimately benefited the city — the goal of all of the families who have been stalwart Newsom backers, he said.

"These are families that have been around for a long time. They've been very dedicated to supporting culture, supporting social causes and also putting their money where their mouths are, and keeping their businesses in San Francisco through the good times and the bad times," Swig said. "There are guys in Washington who make fun of San Francisco values, but really San Francisco values are those that find their core in the families that have been around 75 to 150 years, who have supported everything ... good about San Francisco — social, political and business. And Gavin recognizes that, appreciates that and respects that."

The Swigs

They were once owners of the historic Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco.



She is a trustee emeritus at the San Francisco Art Institute.

Mae Swig
(deceased)

Benjamin Swig
(deceased)

He bought the Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco in 1945.

Richard Swig
(deceased)

Melvin Swig
(deceased)

His grandson Tyler was one of the whistleblowers at blood-testing company Theranos

Roselyne C. Swig
\$26,000

Marcia Hove
(deceased)

Charlotte
Maillard Shultz
\$12,750

George P. Swig
\$1,250

Susan Swig
\$1,500

Richardson
Watkins
\$1,500

Former U.S. secretary of State

Darian Swig Rick Swig
\$9,250 \$30,750

Sari Swig
\$750

She's planned special events at City Hall for every mayor since 1988.

Kent M. Swig
\$750

Phyllis Diamond
(deceased)

Adam Swig
\$1,000

Benjamin Swig
\$1,000

Steven L. Swig Mary Green Swig
\$23,000 \$20,500

She was the founder of a lingerie company which ceased operation in 2014

[See all donations +](#)

Susie Tompkins Buell, the co-founder of clothing brand Esprit and outdoor retailer North Face, remembered Newsom as a young man.

“He was the boy about town. Everybody wanted to date him,” she said, recalling that one of her daughters was in a relationship with Newsom in the 1990s. “He was the smartest, the best-looking. He went through a cocky stage, and then an arrogant stage. Now he’s in a total serving stage. He paid his dues, I’ll tell you.”



Jennifer Siebel Newsom and Susie Tompkins Buell attend a NARAL Pro-Choice America luncheon in 2017 at the Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco. (Susana Bates / Drew Altizer Photography)

Tompkins Buell said that while she always believed Newsom was charismatic and bright, she watched him mature as an elected official, husband and father.

“I’ve known him socially for a long time, but then when he was mayor, I observed a very evolving person as he handled his

problems and grew into his job,” she said.

Tompkins Buell and her family have contributed more than \$110,000 to Newsom’s political endeavors over the years, appreciative of his environmental and social policies, such as his efforts to redirect the city’s cash payments to San Francisco’s homeless to housing and services.

“I’ve watched him closely and I was very, very impressed by the quality of his visceral understanding of the problems we have,” she said.

The Buells

The Buells are Democratic fundraising powerhouses.



She and her ex-husband Doug Tompkins ran clothing companies Esprit and the North Face together.

Susie Tompkins Buell
\$71,150

She and the Clintons are close friends. She first met Bill Clinton at a fundraiser in Sacramento in 1991.

Mark Buell
\$26,450

A designer who has worked with Jawbone, PUMA and Swarovski.

Sabrina Buell
\$2,250

Yves Behar
\$10,500

According to Behar’s Instagram, he and Sabrina wed at Burning Man in 2017

[See all donations +](#)

Tompkins Buell is a confidante of Hillary Clinton who has spent millions of dollars backing Democratic candidates and causes. But Newsom’s support among San Francisco’s elite crosses party lines.

“We’re one of the few long-term, old-school Republican families in the city. This says a lot about Gavin, that he gets out votes, too, because we’re looking at 80 years of Republicanism,” said filmmaker Todd Traina, son of the late shipping magnate John Traina and philanthropist **Dede Buchanan Wilsey**. His brother Trevor, also a Newsom donor, is Trump’s ambassador to Austria.

Altogether, 10 members of the Traina family have given more than a quarter-million dollars to Newsom’s campaigns.

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Ann

The Trainas and Wilseys

A blended family of Democrats and Republicans — who come together to fund Gavin Newsom.



Alfred Wilsey
(deceased)

\$500

She's one of San Francisco's most prominent socialites, raising money for civic institutions and political figures.

Diane B. "Dede" Wilsey

\$213,650

John Traina Jr.
(deceased)

\$850

After John and Diane's divorce, shipping magnate Traina married romance novelist Danielle Steel.

Alfred Wilsey Jr.
(deceased)

\$500

Mary K. Wilsey

\$500

He's the U.S. ambassador to Austria

He's a producer. His most recent film premiered at the San Francisco International Film Festival, where he serves on the board.

Michael W. Wilsey

\$2,500

Barbara C. Wilsey

Brian Wilsey

\$2,750

Alexis Traina

\$6,500

Trevor Traina

\$10,000

Todd Traina

\$18,300

Katherine Traina

\$3,000

[See all donations +](#)

"We all separately backed him and we never internally talked about it," Traina said, noting that he appreciated Newsom adding a businessman's perspective to the county Board of Supervisors. "It wasn't that we said we were making a family decision. It was more that we just all agreed that we liked him and we liked what he stood for."

He added that his ties to Newsom go back to their time as teenagers, when Newsom attended Redwood High School in Marin County and Traina attended University High School in San Francisco.

"We were sports rivals and we had the same group of friends, and he just really had a winning personality and was very likable," Traina said. "He was very similar to the way he is now — spunky, bright, charming, he lit up a room. I wouldn't have known at the time he had a definite interest in politics, but he has always had the same personality."

The Traina family roots go back to shipping magnate John Traina, who was married to Dede Buchanan and then romance novelist

Danielle Steel. Buchanan, whose great-grandfather founded Dow Chemical, later married real estate magnate Alfred Wilsey. She remains a major philanthropic force in the city, notably raising more than \$200 million to rebuild the earthquake-damaged De Young Museum.

“We deeply love the city and we love the traditions of the city, and we were brought up to be charitable and to understand the significant importance of giving back,” Todd Traina said.

Richard Guggenhime, a prominent San Francisco attorney who provides financial advice to wealthy families, has spent four decades working for various civic boards. Currently on the city’s airport commission, a position to which Newsom first appointed him, Guggenhime has given Newsom more than \$30,000 in his bid to become governor. In 1998, his wife, Judy, now chairwoman of the San Francisco General Hospital foundation board, gave Newsom \$250 to help kickstart his supervisor campaign.

The Guggenhimes

The Guggenhimes are San Francisco philanthropists.



Charlotte Guggenhime
(deceased)

He's a prominent San Francisco lawyer and has served on many city government boards.

Richard E. Guggenhime
(deceased)

Richard Guggenhime
\$59,750

Judith H. Guggenhime
\$2,000

Martha Guggenhime
(deceased)

\$500

She's chair of the board directors of the San Francisco General Hospital Foundation.

[See all donations +](#)

Roberts, the Chronicle’s former managing editor, said the role of San Francisco’s most prominent families in public life has shifted over the years. They have largely stopped seeking public seats, but still try to control the levers of power.

The longtime support for Newsom underscores that point.

“They phased out of any public visibility. But behind the scenes, they were still the ruling class,” Roberts said.

Contact the reporters

About this story

The Times compiled a complete list of Gavin Newsom's donors by combining data from two sources: The [San Francisco Ethics Commission](#) and the California Civic Data Coalition's [archive of data](#) collected by California's secretary of state. The list includes every contributor disclosed in fundraising reports filed by five campaign committees during Newsom's time at San Francisco City Hall, plus four from his runs for state office.

Contributions to those committees are limited by local and state law, which is why donors frequently gave in similar amounts. Donors in the local races were capped at \$500, with the exception of the 2003 mayor's race, where they were allowed to give \$750. In the lieutenant governor's races, donors could give \$13,000 in 2010 and \$13,600 in 2014. The governor's race had the highest limits: \$52,000 in the 2010 and \$58,400 in 2018.

In addition, The Times also included monetary contributions to independent committees supporting Newsom's current campaign for governor. Candidates legally cannot coordinate with such groups, but the committees can accept unlimited amounts.

The donor list does not include the small contributors whose identities are not required to be disclosed by law.

The family trees include only members who donated to Newsom, and their immediate ancestors. Donors frequently reported variations of the same name; to avoid confusion, names on the diagrams are as they appear on their most recent campaign contribution.

The data are as of Sept. 5.

Top photo: With Gavin Newsom, from left: Roselyne Swig and Judith Guggenhime at the Merchants Exchange Club in 2018. (Devlin Shand / Drew Altizer Photography) Second right: Robert Fisher and Newsom attend a gala at the California Academy of Science. Right: Willie Brown (foreground left) and Diane B. "Dede" Wilsey (foreground right) at the de Young Museum. (Drew Altizer)

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