

LOBBY WATCH



★ TEXANS FOR PUBLIC JUSTICE 609 W. 18TH ST., SUITE E, AUSTIN, TX 78701 PH: (512)472-9770 FAX: (512)472-9830

Sex, Lies and Videotape:

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American Phoenix's Ties to Macias Feed Far-Right Conspiracy

The American Phoenix Foundation that claims to have videotaped lawmaker indiscretions continues to deny that it targets moderate Republicans allied with Speaker Joe Straus—even as its hard-right ties appear to deepen.

The non-profit headed by celebrity conservative pranksters [Joseph and Hannah Basel declines](#) to disclose who is paying its photographers to surreptitiously film the Capitol, its watering holes and perhaps even its “hos.” What is known is that conservative Senators Konni Burton, Don Huffines and Lois Kolkhorst were the first campaigns to hire the Basels’ C3 Strategies consulting firm. And Senators Burton and Kolkhorst both [said](#) that C3 was hired without their knowledge by their main consultant: Luke Macias. In the shallow pond of what’s known about the Basels’ finances, this makes Luke Macias a rather big fish.

Macias is the son of ex-Rep. [Nathan Macias](#), who got elected in 2006 to his only House term (he lost his 2008 reelection bid). A striking fea-

ture of Nathan Macias’ only winning campaign is that 85 percent of the \$542,422 that he raised came from just one donor. That was San Antonio Christian-right activist [James Leininger](#) (either directly or through Leininger’s [Texas Republican Legislative Campaign Committee](#)).

Son Luke Macias is a political consultant who founded [Macias Strategies](#) in Bulverde outside San Antonio. Since American Phoenix’s August 2010 birth, 28 political committees have paid more than \$490,000 to Macias Strategies and its agents. Top Macias Strategies clients include seven of the 19 House members who unsuccessfully voted to unseat Speaker Straus this year. These seven House members account for one-third of the money that Macias Strategies received from Texas political committees.

The firm’s top non-candidate client was [Accountability First PAC](#). Like its [cousin](#), [Empower Texans](#), Accountability First has targeted Speaker Straus’s lieutenants in the Republican Primary.

An earlier [Lobby Watch](#) identified conservative contributors who gave more money to the 19 House members who voted against Straus than they did to the 131 members who did not openly challenge the speaker. When researchers ran the top contributors to Macias Strategies clients, they ran into many of those same anti-Straus activists. The contributors in **bold** below all gave more money to the anti-Straus 19 than to the other 131 members of the Texas House.

American Phoenix handlers have suggested that its allegedly salacious videotapes target conservative Republicans, moderate Republicans and Democrats alike. The sketchy money trail surrounding this shadowy group helps explain why many Capitol insiders don't believe that it's true. ●

Top Donors to Macias Strategies Clients (August 24, 2010* through 2014)

Amount	Contributor
\$1,693,922	Texans for Lawsuit Reform PAC
\$688,658	Empower Texans PAC
\$492,400	Jeff & Laura Sandefer (Sandefer Capital)
\$326,361	Accountability First PAC
\$287,500	Farris & Joann Wilks (Frac Tech Service)
\$200,500	Kyle Stallings (Permian Basin Acquisitions)
\$182,074	Tim & Terri Dunn (CrownQuest/Enerquest)
\$169,000	Richard Weekley (Weekley Properties/TLR)
\$164,294	Monty Bennett (Remington Hotel Corp)
\$135,000	North TX Conservative Coalition
\$126,502	Don Dyer (Professional Janitorial Service)
\$121,000	Bob & Doylene Perry (Perry Homes)
\$120,493	Donna Campbell Campaign
\$117,000	Texans for Education Reform
\$101,000	Wallace L Hall (West Fork Partners)
\$100,000	Wilbur 'Ed' Bosarge (Quantlab Financial)
\$100,000	David Weekley (David Weekley Homes)
\$95,601	Michael & Marika Olcott (retired chemist)
\$88,000	Ralph Schmidt (Schmidt Farm Industries)
\$87,945	Thomas Owens (Libertarian activist)
\$81,500	Kathaleen Wall
\$75,000	Dan & Staci Wilks (Frac Tech Service)
\$63,500	Rex Gore (Cleanscapes)
\$54,852	Conservative Republicans of TX
\$52,700	TX Optometric PAC
\$50,000	Trevor & Janice Rees-Jones
\$50,000	K Alan & Cherie Hassenflu
\$50,000	Walter & Suzette Negley (TX Screw Products)

Bold: Gave more to 19 anti-Straus members than to rest of House.

*American Phoenix Foundation's birthday.

Macias Strategies Clients (August 2010* through 2014)

Total Paid	Political Committee
\$127,849	Burton, Konni L.
\$56,205	* Stickland, Jonathan
\$48,250	Kolkhorst, Lois W.
\$28,962	Beebe, Matthew S.
\$27,750	Krause, 'Matt'
\$23,750	Capriglione, Giovanni
\$21,470	* Schaefer, 'Matt'
\$19,870	* Spitzer, Stuart
\$19,445	* Rinaldi, Matthew
\$15,750	* White, Molly S.
\$14,869	* Tinderholt, Tony
\$12,433	Patterson, Jared
\$10,500	* Keough, Mark J.
\$9,500	Accountability First
\$9,050	Crisp, Lee 'Cullen'
\$8,550	Seago, Ted
\$7,422	Campbell, Donna
\$5,990	Stevenson, 'Randy'
\$5,374	Mercer, Kenneth
\$5,000	TX Right To Life
\$3,000	Hall, 'Bob'
\$2,190	Harris, Karen H.
\$2,050	Bradley, J. David
\$2,000	Eby, Philip R.
\$1,150	TX Home School Coal.
\$1,000	Frank, James B.
\$500	Butler, Kristopher R.
\$270	Texans 4 Tollfree Hwys
\$490,149	TOTAL

*Voted to dethrone Speaker Straus in 2015.