



August 19, 2008

Democrats Get Big Gift for Denver

By [DANNY HAKIM](#)

ALBANY — [Tom Golisano](#), the Rochester billionaire and registered Republican, donated \$1 million on Friday to the host committee of the [Democratic Party](#)'s convention in Denver, making him one of the largest donors to the planning efforts surrounding the expected coronation of [Barack Obama](#) as the party's nominee next week.

The donation comes as Mr. Golisano, a three-time candidate for governor, has been using his wallet to re-emerge as a heavyweight in state politics, and worrying Republicans that he is leaning to the left in his latest political incarnation.

Last month, Mr. Golisano formed a political action committee, Responsible New York, and said he would pour \$5 million of his own money into the committee to finance legislative candidates who support his views in a number of areas, including cutting property taxes and overhauling redistricting. The PAC could have a significant impact in the battle this fall over the State Senate, the [Republican Party](#)'s last statewide power base but one that they hold by only a single seat.

Mr. Golisano, who always ran on the [Independence Party](#) line and never got more than 15 percent of the vote, also has not ruled out another political run of his own, saying at a press conference last month that he thought "every day" about running for governor again.

The latest donation, however, will burnish his profile on the national political stage. The donation to the national Democratic host committee comes as the Obama campaign and the Democratic Party have been scrambling for big donors to underwrite the five-day convention, which begins on Monday. For his \$1 million, Mr. Golisano gets a skybox at Invesco Field, where Mr. Obama will deliver his acceptance speech, and 50 additional tickets.

"He could just as easily have supported a Republican," said Steve Pigeon, a longtime adviser to Mr. Golisano and co-chairman of Responsible New York. "It's not a matter of party, it's a matter of ideals and policy."

Mr. Pigeon is the former chairman of the Democratic Party in Erie County and joined the Obama campaign's finance committee a few weeks ago; he subsequently played a key role in soliciting the donation from Mr. Golisano. Mr. Pigeon recently co-hosted a fund-raiser for Mr. Obama in San Francisco and said he would probably organize future events in New York.

Mr. Golisano's \$1 million donation is far above the \$2,300 limit for donors to the Obama campaign itself and is one of the largest "soft money" donations made to the convention committee.

"You're probably looking at more than a dozen, mostly corporations," Chris Lopez, communications director for the host committee, said of contributors of \$1 million or more.

Mr. Golisano is the founder of Paychex, a giant payroll processing company, and also the owner of the National Hockey League's Buffalo Sabres. Forbes Magazine recently estimated his net worth at \$2 billion.

His political affiliations have always been fluid. He used his wealth to help found the Independence Party, which is still a sought-after ballot line in New York, where politicians may run on multiple party lines. He joined the Republican Party in late 2005, after [George E. Pataki](#), his rival, decided not to seek a fourth term as governor. But Mr. Golisano ultimately decided not to run in 2006.

In the past, he has donated to the presidential campaigns of Senator [John Kerry](#) and former Representative [Richard A. Gephardt](#), two Democrats, but he also donated \$50,000 in 2006 to the State Senate Republicans.

His talks with some Democrats seeking Senate seats has unsettled Republicans. Earlier this month, [Dean G. Skelos](#), the Senate majority leader, sent an open letter to Mr. Golisano assuring him that "we share the same goals and agendas."

Mr. Golisano's PAC is expected to announce an initial group of candidates that it is supporting later this week.

"We are going to endorse Republicans, we are going to endorse Democrats, we are going to endorse independents," Mr. Golisano said of his new PAC last month. "It's going to be for candidates all over the state."

He declined to comment, through Mr. Pigeon, about the donation to the convention committee.

"We think one of the things New York needs to come back is a strong relationship with the federal government," Mr. Pigeon said. Mr. Golisano, he added, "is looking at Obama's message of change and hope and is very down on the last eight years of what the Bush administration has done, especially the Iraq war."

As for who will be using the tickets, Mr. Pigeon said Mr. Golisano would probably bring three grandchildren and some members of his political staff.

"There have been no decisions," he said, adding, "I'm sure he'll be inviting a lot of dignitaries, both nationally and from the state."

Copyright 2008 The New York Times Company

http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/19/us/politics/19convention.html?_r=3&scp=1&sq=golisano&st=cse