

Firefighters spent thousands to keep Stracener off bench

By Joe Ortiz, Sacramento Bee

Among the hundreds of campaign expenses incurred by the state firefighters' union political action committees this year, two relatively small line items reflect a grudge the organization has held for years.

The California Department of Forestry Firefighters Small Contributor PAC made 147 contributions to state and local candidate campaigns in 2012. It also made two independent expenditures totaling \$10,500 to oppose Curt Stracener's bid to keep his El Dorado County Superior Court judgeship.

Before former Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger appointed him to the bench in 2010, Stracener worked as a senior litigator for the administration who helped shape furlough strategy.

When Stracener ran to retain his seat, the firefighters countered with a campaign tying him to Schwarzenegger with a website picturing the two men together over a caption, "Two of a kind."

Stracener won re-election in the conservative county.

Stracener's race accounted for a tiny fraction of the \$1.39 million the 3,700-member union spent through its two PACs. Some \$821,000 went to campaigns and \$267,000 went to independent expenditures, according to disclosure documents filed by the organization. Much of the money went into opposing Proposition 32, the failed ballot measure that would have ended payroll-deducted funding of political activities.

About 10 cents of every dollar, some \$123,000, paid for "staff/spouse travel, lodging and meals."

