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Using plastic earns points for California lawmakers

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In this July 17, 2013 file photo, a United Airlines jet approaching Los Angeles International Airport passes in front of a Waxing Gibbous moon. Some California lawmakers' credit cards could earn them miles for flights on United. NICK UT/AP

A story in Sunday's Sacramento Bee explained (<http://www.sacbee.com/news/investigations/the-public-eye/article3515410.html>) how lawmakers charged more than \$4 million on campaign credit cards during the first 18 months of the 2013-14 election cycle. The cards' benefits, though, extend beyond convenience and bridging the gaps in campaign donors' generosity.

Under state law, (http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=GOV§ionNum=89513.) candidates and elected officials can personally collect campaign card reward points and miles.

"Honestly I did it for the frequent-flyer miles," Assemblyman Scott Wilk, R-Santa Clarita, said in a recent interview, explaining why he charged more than \$60,000 in political contributions to his campaign's Chase card. "It's convenience and speed and, two, I happen to get the miles."

More than 100 California lawmakers had campaign credit cards from January 2013 through June 2014, and more than three-dozen reported credit-card payments of \$50,000 or more during that time, state filings show. It's unknown how much they collected in miles and reward points, or how much they redeemed, because that information is exempt from the state's filing rules.

Any perks could be significant. On some cards, cash rebates equal 1 percent or more of purchases. Other cards award miles for flights or points for hotel stays. There's never been a study of campaign credit cards; nationwide, credit cards represented 26.5 percent of consumer purchases in 2013, according to The Nilson Report, which tracks the payment industry,

"I would say if they're smart, they're using a rewards card" and paying off the balance each month, credit-card expert Beverly Harzog said of elected officials with plastic.

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