

1. Susan Kennedy, Chief of staff, Arnold Schwarzenegger

Unlike last year, this year's choice for the top position was not a slam dunk. The list on the whole reflects the waning influence of the Schwarzenegger administration and a cast of power players behind the new candidates for statewide office. But ask the state political players – lobbyists, staff members, consultants and reporters – about who should be Numero Uno, and the same answer keeps coming up – Susan Kennedy. Her role? She manages the state. She has redefined the job of chief of staff and remains the bottleneck through which most Capitol decisions are made. The big question about Susan: When will she leave to become a lobbyist?

2. Joe Nunez, California Teachers Association

It may seem odd to place the head of the CTA toward the top of this year's list, considering we're entering a budget season where education is expected to take a major hit. But there is still no single interest that wields as much power as CTA, and with election season coming up, that clout is increased dramatically. Just ask any Democrat running in a contested primary election.

3. Maria Elena Durazo, Los Angeles County Federation of Labor

In the wake of the death of Miguel Contreras, there has been much talk about the diminished clout of "the fed." But after losing a battle over gaming compacts, Durazo has forged alliances with major developers to push a plan to build a new NFL stadium through the Legislature, and is teaming with the business community to get a change to the state's term limits law on the November ballot. With close ties to Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, Durazo has maintained the clout of her organization inside the Capitol.

4. Mary Nichols, chairwoman, California Air Resources Board

There is no California regulatory agency more powerful than the CARB or which has a greater national and international reputation. The November election could become a direct challenge to Nichols' clout – between the governor's race and the ballot measure that would slow down California's greenhouse gas remissions law, AB 32. But for now, the shrewd and deft Nichols remains the paragon of the increasing power of the state bureaucracy in this era of term limits.

5. Steve Merksamer, partner, Nielsen Merksamer Parrinello, Mueller & Naylor

As head of the first of the Capitol's superfirms, Merksamer remains a go-to person for Republicans and major players inside the Capitol. His firm casts a wide political net and advises an A-list clientele on law and politics. Merksamer, who was chief of staff to former Gov. George Deukmejian and has been a political force in Sacramento since the 1970s, balances politics and policy.

6. Gale Kaufman, Kaufman Campaign Consultants

This is an even year – Kaufman's time to shine. As political consigliere to the California Teachers Association and the top Democratic consultant on all things initiative-related, Kaufman remains a force inside the Capitol and among some of the Democratic Party's largest political players. This year, she's taking on PG&E's Proposition 16 and girding CTA for a fight to repeal corporate tax cuts in November.

7. Jeff Miller, Capitol Advocacy

The omission of Miller from last year's list was a mistake. We admit it. But this year, Miller's name rose toward the top. As a lobbyist for Capitol Advocates, which won the Top Big Lobbying Firm honors in our survey of legislators last year, and – more importantly – as chief finance officer for the California Republican Party, Miller's influence is unavoidable in Republican circles. As one source put it, when donors are discussing how to move \$1 million checks into the state politics, Miller is the one they contact.

8. Michael Peevey, President, California Public Utilities Commission

This list is always a reminder for us about how power has shifted in California. In a world of term limits and high legislative staff turnover, institutions like the Public Utilities Commission only grow in power. Sure, Peevey has had his setbacks – losing the appointment of Rochelle Chong and tangling with the administration over renewable energy. But the fact that he feels empowered to continually challenge both the legislative and executive branches of government shows just how much power he wields. He chooses his weapons well and doesn't shrink from a good fight.

9. George Soares, Lobbyist, Kahn, Soares & Conway, LLP

Soares is the premier agricultural lobbyist in California, and in a state with the nation's highest farm receipts, that's saying something. Fruits, nuts, water, milk, apples, avocados, dates, cotton, flowers, kiwifruit, blueberries, biodiesel – Soares has 'em all. His creation of the astroturf Latino Water Coalition pushed water development policy – at least, for a while – and Soares is at or near the center of every substantive water discussion in the state.

10. Anne Gust Brown, wife of state Attorney General Jerry Brown

Every time the role of political spouse as advisor is redefined, someone comes along to take it to another level. Mrs. Brown, the former COO of The Gap, is a force in her own right. She is the top adviser and aide to her husband, the attorney general and Democratic gubernatorial standard-bearer. And her influence is increased by Brown's insular style and lean campaign apparatus. Nobody knows who exactly has Jerry's ear, but everybody knows that Anne Gust Brown does.

11. Allan Zarembeg, President, California Chamber of Commerce

During the Schwarzenegger administration, the chamber has been the de facto political arm of the governor's office. Jerry Brown made clear early on he was not willing to cede the business community to Republicans, and ultimately forced Zarembeg to back down over recent TV spots funded by the Chamber. Zarembeg's future clout depends in some measure on the outcome of the governor's race, but if a Republican wins in the fall, the chamber may once again be the training ground for a future gubernatorial administration. But Zarembeg is adept at wooing new governor's regardless of party: Few in the Capitol have forgotten how Zarembeg built an alliance with former Gov. Gray Davis, a Democrat and Brown's former chief of staff.

12. Maria Shriver, Wife of Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger

It's always been hard to quantify Shriver's influence over state politics. That Shriver, a Democrat, has wielded influence over her husband's governance, is clear, and that alone makes her an important political force. She also has maintained a role in hiring top administration officials. While her political expertise is uncertain, her ability to raise money for worthy projects and her networking skills are world class. Add to that the cachet of the Kennedy family and you have quite a package. And as she prepares to leave the life she never wanted for herself, her role of trusted adviser is still an important one.

13. Mac Taylor, Legislative Analyst

Under Taylor's leadership, the legislative analyst's office has taken a more aggressive stand – and not just on number crunching. The LAO has challenged the governor's authority to implement environmental regulations and suggested the Legislature defund efforts to enact those regulations – and that's just for starters. The LAO has quickly adapted its voluminous analyses to the online world, revamped its media strategies and plays a greater role than ever in responding to lawmakers' requests. In a world where the budget is everything, the analyst's office is more important than ever. And Taylor seems all too willing to engage.

14. Bev Hansen, Partner, Lang, Hansen, O'Malley and Miller

Hansen has parlayed decades of legislative experience – both as a staffer and an Assemblywoman – into a career of wielding serious political clout. She was whispering in the ear of Republican leaders looking for concessions as part of a budget deal, and is often called in to help close on the major legislative issues of the year. Her firm's clients read like a laundry list of some of the most powerful interests in the state, including utilities, local governments, gaming interests, health plans – and even some labor clients.

15. Kip Lipper, environmental consultant, state Senate

For years, Lipper has been the legislative staff's top strategist on all things environmental. Lawmakers used to jokingly ask whether a bill had been "Lipperized" – and they still say that, only no longer in jest. Lipper has had his fingers in every major piece of environmental legislation of the past decade, whether it involves water, air quality, land use or energy. Regardless of the house of origin, he's drafted, written, rewritten, negotiated, shot down, pushed through, or hijacked virtually every significant bill that's crossed his radar.

16. Joe Caves, Conservation Strategy Group

Like Lipper, Joe Caves is largely unknown to the public. But Caves, too, exerts a profound influence on environmental policy. Caves' expertise is figuring out funding sources for environmental projects and convincing voters to support them. His latest effort is the \$11.1 billion water bond in November. Caves is part policy maker, part politician, part negotiator, and he's at the center of most of the big money environmental deals in the state.

17. Aaron Read, lobbyist, Aaron Read & Associates

The fancy high-rise office looking down on the Capitol? Check. A track record that began before many Capitol staffers were born? Check? A powerful client list that includes cops, docs and local government? Check. Read would have been on this list years ago, and if his ability to assemble talent around him is a guide, Read and his firm will be on this list for years to come.

18. Kevin Sloat, principal and founder, Sloat Higgins Jensen & Associates

A riser on the list, Sloat appeared twice in our lobbyist awards last fall—getting nods in the categories of "best-connected" and "most likely to cross party lines." His 13 year-old firm has the kind of client list you have to scroll down, twice, to get to the bottom of. Along the way you'll find tech giants (Cisco), powerful tribes (Yocha Dehe Wintun), even a National Hockey League team, the San Jose Sharks.

19. Willie Pelote, Sr., assistant director, American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees

In the midst of budget cuts, labor is in lots of people's crosshairs. Pelote got in a tiff with one of his own union locals a couple years back when they hired their own private lobbyist. Yet Pelote ranked as one of our top liberal crusaders in last year's poll of the best lobbyists. Now he moves into our top 20 of movers and shakers in the Capitol, after not even making the top 100 a year ago. What changed? Pelote has become an increasingly staunch advocate for the rights of labor in the editorial pages, a pain in the side of the Schwarzenegger administration in their fights for furloughs and worker concessions, and a gatekeeper for labor support for Democratic candidates.

20. Dave Low, California School Employees Association

Organized labor does not speak with a single voice. But Low speaks for more than just school employees. He is a tactician and trusted voice among much of the state's divided labor family, and helps guide union resources to political campaigns around the state.

21. Jon Ross, lobbyist, KP Public Affairs

Ross represents some of the largest lobbying clients in the state. From Google to the mortgage bankers association, Ross is a trusted insiders voice for some of the state's largest political players.

22. Henry Gomez, confidante to Meg Whitman

Meg Whitman has hired a lot of advisers. She's hired a lot of Schwarzenegger people, and a lot of Pete Wilson people. But Henry Gomez may be the only Whitman person on the campaign. Gomez is a personal aide de camp for Whitman, dating back to her time at eBay. And while others may be more seasoned political tacticians, no adviser is more trusted inside the Whitman circle than Gomez.

23. Steve Burns, Chevron

As the main political decision maker for oil giant Chevron, Burns is often a key voice, particularly in Republican circles, when it comes to policy decisions. But Burns is also a divvy operator, willing to engage in backroom shuttle diplomacy with political rivals, to help minimize some of the inevitable political skirmishes.

24. Bob White, partner, California Strategies

If White is lower on our list than he was last year, it's only because he's surrounded himself with such an impressive team of Capitol insiders. White gets bonus points for conceiving of the prototype of the new power firm. Why register as a lobbyist when you can be a consultant? The pay is better and the disclosure laws are nil. Just because their name doesn't show up on the lobby ledger much, make no mistake: White's influence inside the Capitol, along with his firm's influence, is felt in all corners of the Capitol.

25. Rick Claussen, Goddard Claussen

It's initiative season, and that means go time for Rick Claussen. While Claussen has had some mixed results with initiative campaigns on the governor's behalf, he's taken on Rob Reiner and nurses, and was able to pass legal reforms on behalf of the business community. In 2008, he helped deliver a victory for Schwarzenegger on the arcane issue of redistricting reform. Claussen and company will have to defend that issue in November as Democrats launch a full assault on Proposition 11.

26. Ed Manning, lobbyist, KP Public Affairs

Manning has been in the middle of some of the biggest deals in the Capitol in recent years. Whether it was helping to forge coalitions with environmentalists over a major piece of regional planning legislation, or being caught in the cross currents of the state's water battle, Manning has solidified his role as a major policy expert with an ability to work across party lines and among disparate interests.

27. Shari McHugh, McHugh & Associates

On our list of best small lobbying firms, voted on by lawmakers, the firm of husband and wife team Shari and Gavin McHugh came up time and time again. The firm represents major players in the business world, including the California Manufacturers Association and California Credit Union League, and a number of health care clients. A former insurance industry lobbyist, McHugh continues to be a strong voice on insurance, financial and healthcare issues in the Capitol.

28. John Latimer, Capitol Advocacy

Sometimes, losing an election can be the best thing to ever happen to you. Just ask John Latimer. After losing a primary race for Assembly in 1998, Latimer, a former Assembly staffer, registered as a lobbyist and became a major power broker during the Gray Davis years. Over the last decade, Latimer and his firm have risen to the top of the Capitol's lobbying ranks.

29. Joe Lang, Partner, Lang Hansen O'Malley & Miller

With some of the state's mega-lobbying firms, it's hard to know exactly who to place on the list. Lang's firm is clearly one of the heavyweights in Sacramento. With close ties to both Republican and Democratic leadership, Lang and his firm are well positioned to remain influential in the Capitol for years to come.

30. Jim Earp, Chairman, California Alliance for Jobs

Earp has become the governor's builder. Whether it's infrastructure bonds or a water deal, Earp and his members have pushed for new construction jobs throughout the Schwarzenegger administration. Earp was a leading force in the fight for new infrastructure bonds. Earp also serves as vice-chairman of the California Transportation Commission, which helps dole out all those transportation bond dollars.

31. Angie Wei, legislative director of the California Labor Federation, AFL-CIO

Wei, a lobbyist, is charged with protecting labor against the periodic onslaught of anti-worker legislation in the Capitol, which mean she engages in almost perpetual warfare with major, well-heeled business interests. But she's suited to the task: In any discussion of California's power players, Wei's name invariably comes up. The Cal Labor Fed is an umbrella group representing some 1,200 unions with more than 2 million members.

32. Dustin Corcoran, CEO of the California Medical Association

Corcoran was tapped as in January, but he was the real power in the CMA long before that. A 12-year veteran with the group, Corcoran made his mark as a lobbyist under the guidance of the late Steve Thompson. He helped pass CMA-supported bills relating to tobacco use, emergency medicine, access to care—the list goes on. He has also turned CMA into a force in election politics, intervening with independent expenditure committees on behalf of Democrats and Republicans alike.

33. Tony Russo, President, Apex Strategies

Russo has worked as a Republican campaign strategist for some of the state's most respected consulting firms. But it is his connections to the state's business community, and its donor base, that places him on our list. With deep connections to the Irvine Company, his former employer, and the Chamber of Commerce, as well as the Republican Party, Russo is another behind-the-scenes rainmakers for Republicans.

34. Jack Kavanagh, Rough & Tumble

In this world of blogs, feed readers and Twitter, it's hard to keep up. In fact, many of us don't. And in this increasingly fractured media world, the power of the aggregators becomes that much more pronounced. For more than 15 years, nobody has done it better when it comes to state news than Jack Kavanagh. Rough and Tumble is still the first stop for most political insiders who want a quick rundown of what's happening in California. And for many reporters, if you're not on Rough and Tumble, it's almost as if you don't exist.

35. Tom Adams, chairman of the board, California League of Conservation Voters

The CLCV's board is quite a group – Ann Nothoff, Steve Blank, Maria Elena Durazo and Joe Dunn also serve – and running the show is Tom Adams, who people in the political and policy worlds say is a major Capitol force. Under Adams, the CLCV is an activist, grass-roots research and campaign group that knocks on doors to raise money and goes to bat for candidates it likes – and fights those it doesn't. It's annual scorecard is a prized for its analysis of environmental votes, and it maintains a full-court lobbying presence in the Capitol.

36. Ed Roski, chairman and CEO, Majestic Realty

Two years ago, we didn't even know who Ed Roski was. Now, we know him as the guy who can help move Democrats to suspend the California Environmental Quality Act, and as a savvy political operator who has forged alliances with labor leaders and prominent Democrats. Now, Roski is teaming with labor groups to push for a change to the state term-limits law. Maybe he liked that taste of political rough and tumble last year.

37. Jeff Randle, Randle Communications

Randle has been around California politics for more than 20 years. As a veteran of the Pete Wilson and Arnold Schwarzenegger campaigns, he has risen among the ranks of trusted insiders to Republican governors. And if there are bonus points for being there early, Randle gets them for being the first consultant Meg Whitman reached out to. It was Randle who prepared the op-research dossier against Whitman to test her political mettle, and he continues to be active in the day-to-day operations of the Whitman campaign.

38. Frank Schubert, president of Schubert Flint Public Affairs

Schubert has a quarter century under his belt as a political consultant, but he may be forever known as the driving force in passing Prop. 8 in 2008. Even opponents concede he ran an effective, disciplined campaign to pass the ban on same-sex marriage, making him the go-to guy for red causes in this blue state. He's also the only person to be named twice by the American Association of Political Consultants as the country's most valuable public affairs professional.

39. Elaine Howle, State Auditor

Think you've got a lot on your plate? Howle's office is overseeing much of the federal stimulus money coming into state, taking a look a lot of California's technology spending, conducting a controversial audit on the family court's system, and putting together the citizens commission that is supposed to rewrite Assembly and Senate districts. A tough-minded public bureaucrat at heart, Howle has her finger in a lot of the big political battles now going on.

40. Nettie Sabelhaus, Senate Rules Committee

Sabelhaus is responsible for vetting all appointees that come before the Senate Rules Committee. In that role, she is the first line of defense for the Senate leader and can help quietly orchestrate the demise of an appointee who she feels is not fit to serve, for one reason or another.

41. Bill Devine, lobbyist, AT&T

Sometimes the sign of being effective is that nothing happens. While the fervor over telephone deregulation has died down, AT&T remains a powerhouse in the Capitol, and Devine is still their voice. They are major lobbying spenders and campaign contributors, and the fact that they haven't had a major attack from inside is a testament to their ability to pull the levers of power when needed.

42. Phil Isenberg, Delta Stewardship Council

Phil Isenberg served as mayor of Sacramento before going to the Assembly in the 1980s, then left to become a lobbyist with A-list clients, an adviser to governors and, most recently, a member of the Delta Stewardship Council, the body that will shape crucial water policy for the fragile delta as well as statewide. Isenberg, a cross between a hyper-kinetic policy wonk and a skilled player of political hardball, has a skill prized by reporters and politicians: He's able to take a difficult subject and describe it in straightforward terms. This is especially useful at the 11th hour when the negotiations get hot and heavy. And Isenberg is usually there.

43. Donna Lucas, Lucas Public Affairs

Donna Lucas, like a number of top communications specialists, started in the Capitol, then left to open up her own shop. Clients followed suit, and Lucas now is one of a handful of the top PR strategists in town. She's also part of a local power family: Her brother, Kip Lipper, is a Capitol player in environmental legislation and her husband, Greg Lucas, the former bureau chief of the San Francisco Chronicle, directs California's Capitol, which offers an erudite and inside look at state politics.

44. Craig Cornett/Chris Woods, budget directors, Sen. Darrell Steinberg and Speaker John Perez

Budget. Budget. Budget. We know it's a cop out to put both Cornett and Woods on the list together, but in this partisan world we live in, we figured it was not fair to split the baby. And it gave us room to put one more person on the list. If it triple flips, is a revenue accelerator or is sold as 'revenue neutral' you can bet it's got Cornett and/or Woods' fingerprints on it.

45. Lenny Goldberg, Lobbyist, California Tax Reform Association & The Utility Reform Network

Lenny Goldberg is a feisty, lone-wolf who spends most of his time in an uphill battle against corporate tax loopholes on one hand and utility companies on the other. He has been involved in so many Capitol negotiations related to the state budget and taxes that it's difficult to keep track. He loses some and wins less, but one thing is clear: Over the past two decades Goldberg has emerged as the Democrats' conscience on tax policy.

46. David Crane, senior adviser, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger

Nobody's job description is more nebulous or amorphous inside the Horseshoe than David Crane. He is the governor's guru on public/private partnerships, and seems to be in the center of all the big end-of-session policy discussions. Outside of Susan Kennedy, Crane is among the most trusted of Schwarzenegger's advisers and continues to keep his hand in all sorts of projects and legislative schemes.

47. Doug Herman, The Strategy Group

Herman is the political brain of John Perez. As we all get familiar with his leadership style, it appears Perez likes to surround himself with people he trusts, and feels comfortable bestowing with delegated authority. If that's true, when it comes to politics, Herman is certainly the speaker's guy.

48. Dorothy Rothrock, vice president of government relations, California Manufacturers and Technology Association

Dorothy Rothrock, an attorney with a sure feel for politics, communications and government, is the point person for the CMTA, a business group that represents some 30,000 California companies with 1.5 million employees. In Capitol speak, "government relations" means "protecting your turf," and Rothrock does exactly that. She is an aggressive advocate of business-friendly legislation and is the public face of the CMTA on key issues. She's been at CMTA for a decade.

49. Jon Fleischman, FlashReport

Jon Fleischman wears two hats – one as an official of the California Republican Party and the other as editor and publisher of the FlashReport, the Web site that plays a major role in reflecting – and shaping – Republican policy. Although viewed as a must-read for the GOP cognoscenti and insiders, Fleischman has steadily broadened the content of the site and regularly links to stories mainstream reporting, and he often is the first to break major stories affecting Republicans, such as the Mike Duvall scandal.

50. Jerry Roberts and Phil Trounstine, CalBuzz

Perhaps it says more about our world that the top media impresarios on our list are online-only. With CalBuzz, former Chronicle editor Jerry Roberts and former Gray Davis flack/Mercury News political editor Phil Trounstine certainly seem to be having fun. They also provide a much-needed, left-of-center political counterweight to Fleischman. But more than that, they have a sense of humor, and their reporting and punditry reflect a sound institutional knowledge -- a valuable commodity in the transitory Capitol world.

**51. Parke Skelton,
SG&A Campaigns,**

The Los Angeles-based Parke Skelton pops up everywhere all the time in legislative campaigns, but despite his success rate and his energy level, he flies under the radar of many political observers. In the cynical world of political campaigning, Skelton is something of a rarity: He's a progressive Democrat with a high dose of ideological purity who has taken on chores for top Democratic leaders – including L.A. Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and former Assembly Speaker Karen Bass – but who also handles new contenders hoping to make their way up.

52. George Skelton

Los Angeles Times columnist George Skelton gets covered with praise or hung in effigy, depending on his latest column, but virtually everybody who watches California politics reads him regularly. Partly, that's because he works for the L.A. Times, which carries a cachet even in a world overrun by mouthy, Internet-based pundits. But mostly it's because his passion for accuracy and analysis shine through in every column.

53. Dan Walters

For three decades, Dan Walters' column has been a must-read for elected officials, staffers, lobbyists, the statewide political media and, last but not least, the public. Dan, who often uses his column to break stories, is a reporter's reporter and happily takes on everyone, left and right, but mostly left, to the outrage of many Democrats. He pulls no punches, doesn't lob soft balls to sweeten sources and happily sees politics as blood sport and high entertainment. Bravo.

54. Joe Edmiston, executive director, Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy

Every time we try to keep Joe Edmiston off the list, he keeps popping back on. Edmiston is one of the most influential people in California, a master bureaucrat, because he knows how to work political money and political power – which are often the same. He's firmly lodged in his empire at the Conservancy, an empire based at least in part on land acquisition and regulatory maneuvering.

55. Peter Douglas, California Coastal Commission.

Peter Douglas, like Edmiston, is a master bureaucrat and a power to be reckoned with in the halls of government. Few people in California have made as many enemies as Douglas. At the Coastal Commission, enemies seem to spring from the ground, if not the sea – and you can chalk up another one for each decision that goes against an affluent property owner who wants an ocean view. But under Douglas' management the Commission has earned an enviable national reputation as a coastal watchdog. And even governors are leery of messing with CC's budget.

56. Nancy McFadden, senior vice president, Pacific Gas & Electric Company.

Nancy McFadden's title is fancy – senior VP of PG&E and special adviser to the head of PG&E Corp. – but what she really does is direct PG&E's state, local and federal government relations. That takes in a lot of political territory. A couple of years ago, she played a pivotal role to block an attempt by Yolo County residents to join the Sacramento Municipal Utility District. This year, she's quarterbacking PG&E's effort in Proposition 16 to make it harder for any locals to form their own utility district or hook up with an existing one. McFadden, a former top official in Gov. Gray Davis' administration, doesn't want to lose any ratepayers, and they're spreading plenty of money around to both parties to enlist all the help they can get.

57. Rick Caruso, L.A. developer

Los Angeles developer Rick Caruso has proven his ability and willingness to play both sides of the political aisle. He has given money to Gov. Schwarzenegger and raised eyebrows when he decided to host a fundraiser for Democrat Jerry Brown. And if he plays his cards right, he just might be the next mayor of Los Angeles. Caruso is the latest in a line of moderate Republicans looking to forge a pro-business coalition to lead Los Angeles. In the meantime, Caruso is sewing the seeds for a run by spreading some of his significant political capital around.

58. Darius Anderson, Platinum Advisors

When Gray Davis was recalled in 2003, insiders believed the role of insider-lobbyist Darius Anderson would be diminished. But Anderson, now based in San Francisco, remains a major force in the lobbying world, in part because of his close relationship to Susan Kennedy, who served Davis in a top position and is Schwarzenegger's chief of staff. He's also a major land developer, and he has lobbied CalPERS on behalf of a client who landed a \$25 million investment. The CalPERS role raised eyebrows because the client, Markstone Capital, was founded by a businessman who stepped down after pleading guilty to pension fraud in New York. (Update: This week, Anderson agreed to a \$500,000 fine in connection with the New York influence-peddling investigation.)

59. Scott McDonald, Woodward McDowell

Scott McDonald is a key political strategist for Woodward McDowell, the Burlingame-based communications firm that seems to be involved in every major business-driven push against or around environmental rules. For one thing, he is an architect of the AB 32 Implementation Group, which despite its title is critical of California's landmark greenhouse gas emissions law. McDonald played a role in the most important environmental legislation of 2009, which gave L.A.-area air-quality regulators the right to resume distributing air-emission credits. That plan, denounced by environmentalists and fought in court, was viewed as a major victory for business.

60. Jay Hansen, legislative director of the Building and Construction Trades Council

Jay Hansen is the BTC's political point man and is in the top tier of players representing organized labor – a key position in any year, but especially critical this year in the high-stakes gubernatorial election where labor is all but certain to play a decisive role. Hansen, who has powerful political antenna, is at or near the center of every major labor-linked political strategy decision in California.

61. Harvey Rosenfield, Consumer Watchdog

Harvey Rosenfield – attorney, consumer advocate and thorn in the side of insurers from California to Washington, D.C. – is a former Nader's Raider who now heads Consumer Watchdog, the Santa Monica-based group that goes after insurance companies and others on behalf of consumers. Rosenfield, whose group has a hefty dose of trial-bar funding, is a major California political player and a deft handler of the media. He wrote Proposition 103, the landmark ballot initiative that voters approved in 1988 to outlaw discriminatory practices by the insurance industry.

62. Brian Kelly, policy adviser to Senate Leader Darrell Steinberg

When it comes to the power players in "the building," Brian Kelly is at or near the top of everybody's list. The detail-driven Kelly used to handle transportation issues specifically, but he has since branched out to become the Senate leader's top policy person.

63. Rick Simpson, adviser to Assembly Speaker John Perez

In the world of term limits, senior Capitol staffers become more important. And staffers like Rick Simpson, who has been in the Assembly dating back to Willie Brown's speakership, has been a fixture in the Building for more than two decades. And good thing, too. He's one of the only people left who actually understand the state's increasingly complicated system of education finance, which makes up about half of the state's overall general fund budget.

64. Jeff Kightlinger, general counsel and chief executive officer, Metropolitan Water District of Southern California.

In the world of water politics, Jeff Kightlinger is a major player but he could walk unrecognized down a corridor in the state Capitol. The MWD – also known as the Met – is the water wholesaler for almost all of Southern California, and that means that Kightlinger is at the center of power over California's single most important commodity. His decisions and recommendations affect nearly half of California's population.

65. Jason Kinney, partner, California Strategies

There is perhaps no better example of the next generation of California political powerbrokers than Jason Kinney. With close ties to several top Democrats, including Gavin Newsom and Darrell Steinberg, Kinney remains close to Democratic power in Sacramento. Kinney also advises some of the Capitol's most influential interests, including AT&T and numerous healthcare clients. But as a political adviser rather than a registered lobbyist, we're never quite sure exactly what he's up to or who he's representing.

66. Mark Macarro, Pechanga Band of Lusieno Indians

Macarro was the face that helped sell tribal gaming to California voters more than a decade ago. He became the spokesman for the Proposition 5 and Proposition 1A campaigns, which helped change tribal and California politics forever. While tribal issues have ebbed in importance inside the Legislature, Macarro and Pechanga remain active in state and local politics, and are still a viable political force.

67. Richard Milanovich, Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians.

Organized labor's influence is well documented. So when new compacts for some of the state's largest gaming tribes came before the Legislature a couple of years ago, many Democrats were forced to decide between two sets of loyal friends. It is a testament to the power of tribes like Agua Caliente that the compacts were ultimately approved, over the wishes of many big wigs in the labor movement. And the show of force remains a reminder that Agua Caliente, and its chairman, is that rarest of Capitol breeds -a reservoir of political power at its disposal.

68. Rose Ann DeMoro, California Nurses Association

The nurses have built the reputation of being one of the most aggressive labor groups in the state. Since taking an aggressive stance against the 2005 special election in California, CNA has remained a loud, progressive voice inside the world of labor. As they build a national organization, CNA is no longer just a bunch of rabble-rousers. They've followed up their energetic campaigns with real money in recent years, and DeMoro has been at the heart of the effort.

69. David Quintana, California Tribal Business Alliance

Almost from scratch, Quintana has helped build the California Tribal Business Alliance into a force in Capitol politics. Conceived as a coalition of tribal governments that took a less combative approach to issues of sovereignty, Quintana's propensity for deal making has miffed some who have gotten in his way, but he has steadily grown the power and influence of CTBA inside the Capitol.

70. Adam Mendelsohn, partner, Mercury Public Affairs

For the last three years, Mendelsohn has been the political arm of the Arnold Schwarzenegger operation. This year, in that capacity, he is girding for three more battles – the fight to change the state's primary system, and the battle to save the governor's greenhouse gas law and redistricting initiative. In the meantime, Mendelsohn has laid the foundation for a firm to live on after the Schwarzenegger meal ticket leaves down, forging a bipartisan alliance with former Speaker Fabian Nuñez to prepare Mercury for the next phase.

71. Liz Snow, California Building Industry Association

Mea culpa, mea culpa. Among the many things we heard about last year's list was the fact that we overlooked Snow's influence in California politics. Since then, Snow has left her perch as the head of the California Dental Association PAC to perform the same job for CBIA. While the PAC may not have the same reach as the dental PAC, its resources are not insignificant. And with Snow at the helm, the safe money is on Snow raising the PAC's profile in the years to come.

72. Bill Burke, chairman, South Coast Air Quality Management District

Bill Burke is proof of an increasingly true axiom in state politics – more and more power is moving to the permanent bureaucracy. Through his positions on the California Coastal Commission and South Coast Air Quality Management District, Burke remains a clandestine but unmistakable force in the Capitol. Whether it's getting a bill jammed through the Legislature to extend his term on the air board or orchestrating an 11th-hour deal involving air emission credits, Burke may not be a visible presence in Sacramento, but his fingerprints are all over the place.

73. Deborah Gonzalez, California Dental Association

Gonzalez was the Capitol's policy guru for Republicans, arguably since her time in Speaker Curt Pringle's office. Gonzalez left the Capitol last year to take over the political operations of the California Dental Association, one of the state's most active PACs, as was evidenced in the recent fight to elect Bill Emmerson to the Senate. Whether or not Gonzalez will have the influence and control over the PAC that her predecessor, Liz Snow, had remains to be seen, but if past experience is any guide, we wouldn't bet against her ability to remain a powerhouse in state politics in her new position.

74. Yvonne Walker, president SEIU Local 1000

In California and nationally, SEIU remains an organization in the throes of transition. Amid the turmoil, Walker serves as head of the largest state employee union -- an increasingly difficult task as the state continues to wrestle with deep budget deficits. Walker and her union have led the charge against the governor's furlough plans, and remain a visible symbol of labor's continued power in the Capitol.

75. Tom Hiltachk, managing partner, Bell, McAndrews and Hiltachk

Republican legal guru Tom Hiltachk is one of a handful of political attorneys in the state who are players in that world where law and politics come together. He's the legal adviser to the California Republican Party, he regularly challenges Democrats before the Fair Political Practices Commission, and he fights Democrats' ballot initiatives – for starters. He advises GOP office holders and political contenders. With partners Chuck Bell and Colleen Andrews, Hiltachk is a potent GOP force.

76. Dan Weitzman, Democratic fundraiser

As the top fundraiser for both Senate leader Darrell Steinberg and Speaker John Perez, Weitzman remains the main conduit between the Capitol Democrats and the donor community. While fundraising among members is less centralized than it used to be, Weitzman has retained his importance and influence through three consecutive speakers.

77. Richard Mersereau, policy director, Assembly Republican Caucus

Leaders may come and go, but Richard Mersereau, it appears, is here to stay. As the policy director for the Assembly Republican Caucus, Mersereau has served as the loyal opposition as the revolving door spins in the Republican leader's office. While Democrats have held a comfortable majority in the house for years, Mersereau has kept Republicans on task and on message with a deep knowledge of policy and a work ethic celebrated by his colleagues.

78. Moira Topp, lobbyist, Sloat Higgins Jensen and Associates

Topp cut her teeth inside the Capitol -- both on the legislative side and inside Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's administration. After a stint as the Chamber of Commerce's lobbyist on transportation and environmental issues, she joined the super firm of Sloat Higgins Jensen, one of the top billing lobbying firms in the state. The firm's client list reads like a who's who of Republican interests and local governments, with a few major businesses thrown in for good measure. And when it comes to anything involving environmental or transportation policy, Topp is inevitably in the thick of the fight.

79. David Townsend, Townsend Raimundo Bessler and Usher

Townsend has carved out a niche helping business-friendly Democrats and some not so Democrat-friendly businesses over the years. But he has used that leverage as the Democrats' middle-man to carve out a heck of a business for himself. Currently, Townsend is leading PG&E's efforts to limit the expansion of publicly owned utilities on the June ballot. Townsend is also a consigliere for Sacramento mayor Kevin Johnson and numerous other pols throughout the state.

80. V. John White, executive director, Center for Energy Efficiency and Renewable Technologies

If it involves energy, any kind of energy, V. John White, either knows about it, has something to do with it, or is lobbying for or against it. His specialty is renewable and alternative energy, and as California expands its renewable portfolio, "V. John" is at the center of the action.

81. Barry Broad, lobbyist, Teamsters Public Affairs Council, and others

If there were extra points for literary prowess, Broad would shoot to the top of this list. As it stands, Broad is a constant in the labor community -- but not always in lock step with Democratic Party insiders. With clients ranging from the Teamsters to podiatrists to scientists to jockeys, not to mention several powerful public employee unions, Broad is often an outspoken voice on key Capitol issues. He's also finishing up a second novel, a follow up to "Eve of Destruction" -- reportedly dreamed up while he was sitting through a particularly boring legislative hearing.

82. Lisa Gasperoni, adviser to Senate Leader Darrell Steinberg

As Darrell Steinberg's political brain, Lisa Gasperoni has one of the Capitol's most thankless jobs. Senate Democrats face up to four tough races in the fall -- two seats that they will have to defend, and two more they will try to snatch from Republicans. Gasperoni has had to build an operation without much of the big labor money that Senate Democrats have banked on in the past, not to mention what promises to be a challenging environment for Democrats this fall.

83. Alice Huffman, president, California NAACP

Huffman has maintained her influence as the keeper of one of the most coveted political endorsements in the state. As head of the state NAACP, Huffman has weighed in on a variety of issues from public power to redistricting, and has shown a willingness to buck the party line in the process.

84. Jim Brulte, partner, California Strategies

As a former Republican leader of both the Assembly and the Senate, Jim Brulte continues to play the role of informal adviser to a number of politicians around the state. As part of the California Strategies super firm, Brulte wields power quietly and, at times, remotely. But with the ear of some of the state's top Republican politicians, plus a reputation as a deal-maker among Democrats, Brulte is one of the few pols who has retained influence after his legislative power has gone.

85. Roger Salazar, partner, Acosta/Salazar

Since joining forces with Andrew Acosta in 2005, Salazar and his firm have steadily risen up the ranks of Democratic consultants and strategists. A veteran of the Gray Davis administration and the Clinton White House, Salazar now is the "outside" communications consultant for Speaker John Perez, and for a new labor-backed independent expenditure committee that has pledged millions to help Jerry Brown.

86. Paula Treat, lobbyist, Pechanga Band of Luiseno Indians

As the chief lobbyist for the Pechanga Band and director of their political action committee, Treat continues to wield influence inside the building. But beyond just her client list -- which also includes Edison International, Treat's institutional knowledge -- not to mention her ability to spin a good political war story -- gives her influence beyond her clientele.

87. Amy Brown, partner, DiMare Van Vleck and Brown

With a background in local government issues, Brown has become one of the Capitol's top voices on retirement and pension issues. Her firm boasts a diverse client list that includes business giants like Safeway, the California Medical Association, local water boards, Indian tribes and local governments.

88. Soyla Fernandez, lobbyist, Fernandez Government Solutions

Somehow, when the end of session comes around, Soyla Fernandez seems to be everywhere. As a solo operator in her own lobbying firm, Fernandez's clients include Capitol giants like Southern California Edison and Verizon.

89. Jeanne Cain, executive vice president, California Chamber of Commerce

Jeanne Cain is the chairwoman of the multibillion-dollar State Compensation Insurance Fund and she's the executive vice president of the California Chamber of Commerce. She wears other hats as well, but those two are enough: She knows the Capitol landscape and she's been a business-friendly warrior on any number of political issues over the past decade. Her tenure at SCIF hasn't been without controversy: She's riding herd on a widely reported internal investigation involving the actions and potential conflicts of past executives. SCIF is probably the largest, most obscure entity in state government. The cliché, "powerful but obscure" applies here.

90. Charles Munger

Perhaps nobody is causing more heartache for Speaker Nancy Pelosi than Charles Munger. The Stanford scientist and son of the Vice-Chairman of Berkshire Hathaway has made it his mission to take drawing Congressional districts out of the hands of the Legislature. He has dedicated millions to qualifying a measure for the November ballot to do just that. Congressional Democrats, fearing their incumbency threatened, have responded in kind with millions of their own.

91. Scott Wetch, partner, Carter Wetch and Associates

Wetch is the go-to person for the pipe trades and electrical workers unions, among a host of other clients. His unions have gone contrary to many other powerful labor groups on key issues like the implementation of the state's greenhouse gas law. Wetch was also instrumental in holding Democrats' feet to the fire on the recent fight over renewable energy standards, despite intense pressure from the governor's office. Wetch was also hired by developer Ed Roski to help earn support from labor-friendly Democrats for a plan to build an NFL stadium in Los Angeles County.

92. Donne Brownsey, Sacramento Advocates

Brownsey is a Capitol trailblazer. A former Capitol super-staffer for Senate Democrats, she became one of the first women to run her own lobbying firm, she joined forces with Barry Brokaw's Sacramento Advocates. Brownsey was in the thick of last year's water negotiations and represents a host of diverse clients inside the Capitol.

93. Maggie Linden, Ogilvy Public Affairs

After serving three different Assembly Speakers, Linden was recruited by Ogilvy to help build their Sacramento practice. For the last several years, Ogilvy has kept busy fighting off ballot-box efforts to require minors to notify their parents before receiving an abortion. Ogilvy has also been at the center of the effort to promote the state's new redistricting law, which is facing a possible repeal at the ballot box this November.

94. Dan Morain, senior editor, Sacramento Bee

Morain's resignation from the Los Angeles Times left a gaping hole in the Capitol press corps. He had carved out a niche as the best reporter on politics and money in the state, and handled tribal gaming and a host of other issues. After a brief experiment as a PR flack, Morain is back with the Sacramento Bee as a columnist. His columns are still anchored in solid reporting and as he continues to find his voice as a columnist, his influence in the state will only increase.

95. Mike Madrid

Over the last several years, Madrid has quietly helped make local government a force in statewide politics. Madrid helped build the battle plan for what became Proposition 1A, which limited the state's ability to take revenues earmarked for local governments. This year, the League of Cities and other locals are back to renegotiate the deal they made with the voters, asking for a stronger wall around local government dollars.

96. Karen Skelton, Dewey Square Group

Skelton made her mark in Washington as a confidant to Al Gore. But as the head of Dewey's California operation, Skelton has built a practice with close ties to First Lady Maria Shriver. The firm also has close ties to the state labor federation, thanks to Steve Smith, another Dewey principal who brings hard-nosed California campaign experience to the firm.

97. Christy Bouma, Capitol Connection

Bouma is a force in labor politics, which makes her a force inside the capitol. As the chief advocate for the California Professional Firefighters, Bouma has been in the center of some of the major fights inside the Capitol in recent years. And as election season ramps up, the influence of the firefighters is only going to increase. As head of her own firm, Capitol Connection, Bouma also works on behalf of the school employees association and Altria.

98. Jodi Hicks, California Medical Association

When Dustin Corcoran was promoted to CEO of the California Medical Association, Hicks took control of the governmental affairs shop of one of the most powerful associations in the state, and is the first woman to hold the post, which makes her a key player in state politics. Hicks and her team wield influence over a variety of healthcare issues inside the Capitol.

99. Haim Saban, investment banker

The creator of the Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers once said he was a "one-issue guy" when it came to politics. Who knew that issue was redistricting? Saban, a former member of the UC Board of Regents, has been a consistent Democratic donor, but rose to mega-donor status this month when he chipped in \$2 million at the behest of Congressional leaders to fight changes in the state's redistricting law.

100. Kassy Perry, Perry Communications

Perry's firm remains one of the top PR firms in California politics. The firm's bread and butter is representing companies and organization involved in health care -- including PhRMA, Johnson & Johnson, Pfizer and Merck -- which is sure to continue as a top issue in coming years. Their highest profile recent effort, however, was not related to health care: They came in at the last minute to try to help save the failed No on Proposition 8 campaign. But no one seems to be holding that against them.