

## Republican Leader Calls for Oregon Governor, Secretary of State to Return Contributions Made by La Mota's Founders

As the dispensary chain and its founders gave hundreds of thousands of dollars to top Democrats, they allegedly failed to pay their companies' bills.

Oregon's top Republican lawmaker has responded to a *WW* story by calling on Gov. Tina Kotek and other state officials to return campaign contributions from the founders of embattled cannabis chain La Mota.

Earlier this week, *WW* published the results of a [monthslong investigation into La Mota](#), the second-largest dispensary chain in the state.

The two founders of the company and various LLCs they control have been issued over \$1.6 million in tax liens by the Oregon Department of Revenue since 2018. The Internal Revenue Service issued two tax liens in 2022 against the company's founders, Aaron Mitchell and Rosa Cazares, totaling \$1.4 million.

The two founders and various LLCs they control have also been sued 30 times in Oregon circuit courts since 2017, most of the complaints alleging nonpayment of bills.

Meanwhile, since 2019, the couple and La Mota have collectively contributed over \$200,000 to top Oregon Democrats, including Gov. Tina Kotek, Secretary of State Shemia Fagan, Senate Majority Leader Rob Wagner (D-Lake Oswego) and state Labor Commissioner Christina Stephenson. Cazares and Mitchell hosted fundraisers for Kotek and Fagan last year at a mansion in the Northwest hills, from which they were later evicted after the home's owners alleged they had failed to pay months of rent.

Neither Kotek nor Fagan said they would stop accepting contributions from the couple or the company—nor did they say they would return campaign contributions already received. (Stephenson did pledge to take no further money from La Mota companies or founders, as did former labor commissioner and now-U.S. Rep. Val Hoyle.)

Senate Minority Leader Tim Knopp (R-Bend) is now calling for those top Democrats to return the contributions made by La Mota's founders and the company.

"If you're an elected official, I think you have an ethical and moral obligation to only take contributions from people that aren't involved in wrongdoing, and in this case, it's not paying your taxes," Knopp says. "I think that anyone who took contributions from La Mota should return those contributions, because they owe money to the state of Oregon in taxes."

(It's unclear how much of the owed taxes the couple has since paid to the state. The tax liens issued include \$592,000 in marijuana sales taxes dating back to 2016. Records show at least \$137,000 of that tax debt has since been paid.)

The Oregon Liquor and Cannabis Commission, which regulates cannabis licenses, continues to grant the La Mota chain new licenses each year.

Knopp says that should change. He says the agency should stop granting La Mota new licenses "until everything is cleared up, including all back taxes paid."

Knopp's counterpart in the Oregon House, Minority Leader Vikki Breese-Iverson (R-Prineville), said in a statement that the allegations against the couple are "undoubtedly concerning and Oregonians should be aware." She stopped short, however, of joining Knopp in demanding that the Democrats return contributions from La Mota and its founders.

She also made a renewed call for an independent firm to investigate the OLCC—a call Republicans first made after *The Oregonian* reported the agency had conducted an internal investigation that found top officials had reserved expensive, limited bottles of bourbon for themselves and associates.

"We are looking at a second allegation revealing either corruption or further agency incompetence," she told *WW* in a statement. "It remains critically important there be an investigation of OLCC done by a nonpartisan, third-party investigator. Oregonians deserve good and transparent government."