



QUID PRO QUO

Denying link between money and policy beyond cynical

Editorial

June 30, 2003

At a recent news conference, U.S. House Majority Leader Tom DeLay said, "It never ceases to amaze me that people are so cynical they want to tie money to issues, money to bills, money to amendments."

The congressman's remark either betrays the height of cynicism or reveals a pathological failure to comprehend what's going on. Given DeLay's history of wily maneuver and relentless, sometimes secretive fund-raising, the odds favor the former.

Last year executives at an unsavory Kansas utility company, Westar Energy, directed \$25,000 to DeLay's Texans for a Republican Majority. The executives spent another \$56,000 in campaign contributions in an effort to profitably influence legislation pending in Congress. The businessmen wanted special help from DeLay, Rep. Joe Barton of Ennis and Rep. Billy Tauzin of Louisiana, all Republicans.

They got it. Only after revelation of a federal investigation of possible fraud at the company did the politicians' affection for aims of the Westar executives erode.

DeLay denied any quid pro quo, and probably none was stated. But business interests focused on enriching themselves do not hand out lavish campaign donations without expecting something in return. Sometimes it is only to avoid the kind of retribution that DeLay has threatened from time to time.

In e-mails, Westar executives hoped their contributions would bring a seat at the table. DeLay has been known to turn over entire offices to lobbyists intent on writing legislation to benefit their clients.

Generously backed by highway contractors, DeLay argues that rail transit won't alleviate congestion. But hundreds of billions of dollars spent on Texas highways haven't alleviated congestion, either.

DeLay says he doesn't support businesses' agenda (special tax breaks and license to pollute and endanger free from government interference). The congressman says businesses support his agenda (handing out special tax breaks and letting industry pollute and endanger less burdened by government interference).

A report issued last week by the Environmental Protection Agency notes that the air and water are cleaner now than they were 30 years ago. That result is due in large part to anti-pollution laws enforced by the EPA, which DeLay calls the Gestapo.

A former exterminator, DeLay might be sincere in his belief that spreading poison around the environment does everybody a world of good. He also blames school violence on the teaching of modern biology.

Businesses, however, do not support DeLay with campaign cash because they want biology teachers fired. They support DeLay because he is the third-most powerful figure in Washington and is in a position to increase their profits, with or without a stated quid pro quo.

Copyright 2003 Houston Chronicle