

DeLay Is Nervous; Pals' Legal Troubles Mount

by Harley Schlanger

House Majority Leader Tom DeLay (R-Texas) is getting even more worried, as the legal noose tightens around the necks of the flunkies who are alleged to have laundered money on his behalf. A civil case was heard in Austin the first week in March against Bill Ceverha, the treasurer of Texans for a Republican Majority (TRMPAC), who is being sued by five Democrats who lost races in the 2002 elections for the Texas House of Representatives to Republicans who received money from TRMPAC.

The legal issue being raised is whether the \$190,000, which was delivered to the five Republicans, was money from corporations which was laundered through the Republican National Committee (RNC). The funds were originally donated by corporations to TRMPAC, which then gave the money to the RNC, which then turned around the exact amount in contributions to the five GOP candidates. The election of these Republicans gave their party the majority in the state legislature, allowing DeLay to ram through a politically biased redistricting plan; this resulted in a Republican gain of four seats in the 2004 Congressional elections.

The \$190,000 was part of almost \$600,000 which TRMPAC gave to a total of 23 Republicans in Texas in 2002. Under Texas law, corporations are forbidden from making contributions to candidates.

Among the witnesses in the Austin trial was Trevor Potter, a former chairman of the Federal Election Commission, who had been appointed by President George H.W. Bush. Potter described TRMPAC as a "highly sophisticated political operation" that violated election laws. He said the turnaround of \$190,000 was especially disturbing. A verdict in the civil suit is expected in the next two to six weeks.

While DeLay claims the suit is "frivolous," adding, "I'm not watching it at all," he is clearly nervous, as there is also a continuing criminal grand jury investigation into TRMPAC, and several of his key operatives were indicted by Travis County (Austin) District Attorney Ronnie Earle last year. One of those is Jim Ellis, who founded TRMPAC, and currently heads DeLay's "Americans for a Republican Majority." The trial of Ellis and other DeLay flunkies is still pending.

When DeLay accused Earle of trying to "criminalize politics," Earle quipped that being accused of partisanship by DeLay is "like being called ugly by a frog."

Abramoff Is Target of Probe

DeLay is also under scrutiny for his relationship to sleaze-bag "lobbyist" Jack Abramoff, an old ally, who is being investigated for extorting money from Indian tribes involved in casino gambling.

According to *The Hill* newspaper on March 1, the Justice Department has subpoenaed records from a GOP lobby group, the Council of Republicans for Environmental Advocacy (CREA), founded by Grover Norquist of Americans for Tax Reform, and former Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton. The targets of the investigation are Abramoff and his partner Michael Scanlon, a former chief aide and press spokesman for DeLay. The interagency task force investigating Abramoff-Scanlon includes the FBI, the IRS, the public integrity section of the DOJ, and the Interior Department's Inspector General. Abramoff allegedly squeezed tribes that had hired him for work on their gambling casino operations, to give money to CREA; the money was attributed to interest in environmental concerns, but investigators believe it was only because CREA was "close to the Interior Department" and would be useful in arranging favorable decisions for Abramoff's interests.

As *EIR* reported, last November, the Senate Indian Affairs Committee held hearings on the schemes of Abramoff and Scanlon, who received millions of dollars from the Coushatta tribe of Louisiana, to lobby against the opening of rival casinos across the border in Texas. The pair secretly paid millions of dollars of this money to Abramoff's protégé, Christian Coalition founder Ralph Reed, to persuade his religious fundamentalist networks in Texas to campaign to close the Tigua Indians' casino in El Paso, Texas. When the Tigua casino was closed, Abramoff volunteered to work for that tribe for free, to help them reopen it. They paid Scanlon's public relations firm \$4.2 million, which he secretly split with Abramoff, according to testimony at the hearings.

DeLay Runs a Purge

Now, after being admonished by the House Ethics Committee three times, DeLay's strong-arm attack on Ethics Committee Chairman Rep. Joel Hefley (R-Colo.) has backfired. The vindictive DeLay had him removed, followed by the firing, the first week in March, of the staffers who did the investigation. Hefley fired back, telling the *Denver Post* that DeLay ran a "purge" that turned his departure "into a fiasco."

The decline in his margin of victory in the recent election has also unnerved DeLay. He is opening a second office in his district and is spending his weekends home campaigning. With his 2004 opponent, Richard Morrison, already hitting the campaign trail, and the LaRouche Youth Movement mapping out a major offensive to defeat him, the "aura of power" has eroded, and DeLay, who is a leading backer of the Shultz-Bush scam to steal Social Security, may soon find himself out of the Congress, reliving his previous existence—exterminating bugs, not people.