

DELAY: A 21-GUN SALUTE?

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If "things weren't bad enough" for Maj. Leader Tom DeLay:

"Now his friends are planning a tribute in his honor." You "know you're in trouble in Washington when this happens." The 5/12 "salute" will "feature a series of speeches testifying to his greatness and scores of hushed table conversations about whether" DeLay "will survive" as maj. leader and "more important, who might succeed him if he doesn't."

Tickets to the ACU event cost \$250, \$2K or \$10K "to be a member of the host" cmte." The invite says, "This is a testimonial banquet, not a fundraising event" and notes that "all proceeds will go toward defraying the costs of the dinner" (Leibovitch, Washington Post, 5/2).

The "dinner is noteworthy." In the past, "circling wagons was often the prelude to the fall, but now it might be a sign of strength." Now, "a politician under fire" could "survive by stoking his base, painting himself as the victim of an extremist conspiracy, and relying on well-organized activists and friendly media" to "raise money and cast fiery aspersions on accusers." Because of this and the IOUs DeLay has "amassed, thanks to the big money" he's raised for other Reps., "not a single influential House" GOPer has called on DeLay to step down. "Unless that happens, he stays" (Polman, Knight Ridder/Columbia State, 5/1).

DELAY LINEBACKERS READY FOR THE SNAP

Experts say DeLay's defense that he didn't "know about the improper gifts of travel will be severely tested by investigators" if the ethics cmte "begins an examination of a series of trips he took." But "investigators will face their own challenges," including working around a federal criminal investigation that could limit their access to witnesses and documents." The investigation "is expected to being next month."

DeLay atty Bobby Burchfield outlined a detailed defense against the charges DeLay would make if an investigation goes forward." The basic point: DeLay didn't "knowingly accept gift of travel from anyone who was prohibited from inviting him on a trip." Burchfield: "That is a very fundamental aspect of this- what he had knowledge of at the time he took the trips."

On 4/29, Burchfield "listed several points DeLay will make about each of those trips." He said the '97 Russia trip "happened so long ago" that it's "outside the scope of the" cmte -- the rules "have limited reviews to things that happened in the past six years." Both the Russia and Britain trips were

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sponsored by the Nat'l Center for Public Policy Research. Burchfield "pointed out DeLay had no knowledge" of donations to the Center from clients of lobbyist Jack Abramoff.

Even "an outside counsel could find it tough to delve too deeply into the case without colliding with FBI agents and federal prosecutors who are investigating Abramoff." Experts say DeLay "has reason to be nervous." Center for Responsive Politics head Larry Noble: "These investigations have a habit of taking on a life of their own. That must worry DeLay" (Hedges, Houston Chronicle, 5/2).

DeLay "staunchly denies any wrongdoing and said he wants to appear before" the cmte "to clear his name." DeLay:

"[P]erception now is a new standard for me. I know that I have been watched and investigated probably more than even Bill Clinton. They can't find anything, so they're going back to my childhood, going to my family, going to things that happened eight years ago. There's nothing there."

Watchdog groups say "as the accusations stand", DeLay hasn't "broken any laws." They "say if the accusations are true," DeLay is "in violation of multiple" rules and there's "legitimate justification" for the cmte "to sanction or even expel him from the Congress" (Taylor, Washington Times, 5/2).

Chicago Sun-Times' Novak writes, The "decision" by GOPers "to go back to the old" Ethics Cmte "rules to govern the investigation" of DeLay, "was wholly the work" of Speaker Dennis Hastert who didn't "ask for a show of hands from his colleagues" (5/1).

WOULD A LOBBYIST/MOBSTER BE CALLED "A LOBSTER"?

Washington Post's Schmidt and Grimaldi report, Abramoff "is best known as the target" of the investigation into \$10Ms of fees he and Michael Scanlon "collected from casino-owning Indian tribes." But "the wreckage from his brief and tumultuous time" as owner of a fleet of casino ships "threatens to overtake his Washington legal troubles."

Not "long after Abramoff and his partners bought SunCruz Casinos" in 09/00, "the venture ran aground after a fistfight between two of the owners, allegations of mob influence, dueling lawsuits and, finally" the unsolved death of former SunCruz owner, Gus Boulis. Abramoff is the target of an investigation into "whether the casino ship deal involved bank fraud."

The "SunCruz purchase hinged on a fake wire transfer" for \$23M "intended to persuade lenders to provide financing to Abramoff's group." What hasn't "been disclosed are the full details of the alleged fraud" and "the extent of Abramoff's role -- including his used of contacts with" DeLay and Rep. Bob Ney (R-OH) (5/1).

ABRAMOFF SPEAKS

Time's Zagorin asked Abramoff if he considers DeLay "a close friend." Abramoff: "I do." More

Abramoff: "Politicians run for office, and they need the resources to do so. I've dedicated my political life to helping those I support legally obtain the resources they need to get re-elected. ... I can't imagine there's anything I did that other lobbyist didn't do and aren't doing today. ... It's almost comical how my every action and thought have been scandalized" (4/30).

Forward's Kessler writes on the Time interview, Abramoff "denied" a story by Newsweek's

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Isikoff, and "Now Abramoff is taking to the pages of Isikoff's archrival, Time magazine to diss the reporter's work further" (5/2).

TRIPPIN'

Sen. Charles Schumer (D-NY): "Maybe [DeLay will] go on one final trip to Houston and not come back." Schumer, on cong. trips: "It depends what kind of trip you're talking about here. Some of them are always on trips. ... I think the trips are overdone" ("Real Time," HBO, 4/29).

Chicago Tribune's Zuckman: "There are a number of investigations going on that have to do with DeLay, that have to do with associates of DeLay. So he's sort of in the crosshairs right now. But I think the coverage has in fact widened and looked at other members of Congress have relatives on the payroll. What do they do? Other members of Congress have taken trips that might be problematic. What's been going on with them? So the fact is this is opening up a huge can of worms for every member of Congress right now" ("Reliable Sources," CNN, 5/1).

House Min. Leader Nancy Pelosi: "These trips have a value. But they should-it's not about lobbyist, mind you. These are about approved by the ethics committee organizations. If the lobbyists misrepresents-if the organization misrepresents and the lobbyist is paying for it, then that's a violation" ("This Week," ABC, 5/1).

SWEET CHARITY

Salon's Benjamin writes, In the "fundraising empire" known as "DeLay Inc., few figures have been more central to filling the coffers than Warren RoBold." RoBold along with two other DeLay aides has been indicted by the TX grand jury "on charges of illegally raising" funds from corporations "and funneling them through" a DeLay PAC.

RoBold's "fundraising duties for DeLay extended beyond the purely political." Records show back in '01, RoBold earned \$50K "to raise corporate donations for DeLay's nonprofit foundation for abused and neglected foster children." RoBold's "multiple" roles for DeLay's "various enterprises exemplifies the close relationship between DeLay's charity work and his political machinery." In doing "double time" DeLay's "fundraisers sometimes simultaneously hit up corporations with big stakes in bills before Congress."

Nat'l Cmte for Responsive Philanthropy pres Rick Cohen "has called DeLay a master of combining politics and charity work." But "the connection between DeLay's political machinery and his charity work, however, is a significant new concern to those who have already

suspected that DeLay's nonprofit work" isn't "much more than an cover for corporations to cozy up to DeLay" and his allies. Experts say this "at the very least creates the appearance" that his philanthropy is "but a sideshow the main event: "selling access to politician" (5/2).

STILL GOT LOVE FOR THE STREET

Chicago Sun-Times' Novak writes, While ex-Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-GA) "had become dysfunctional" when "he was forced out," DeLay "is at the peak of his powers." This "explains why" GOP Reps. "have been firm in sticking with him." His "importance goes beyond putting out fires." DeLay "has made mistakes," though they "hardly warrant the death penalty." The point is "that DeLay is the most important Republican leader in Congress." That's why Pres. Bush "was pictured with him on newspaper front pages all over America" 4/27. "DeLay figures to be around

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longer that the conventional wisdom imagines" (5/2).

WH CoS Andrew Card, on if Bush is worried about DeLay's ethics troubles: "The president has great confidence in the leadership that has come from the United States House of Representatives under the Republicans, and Tom DeLay is the Republican leader. And he's been a strong leader for this president. He's been very productive in getting things done. ... And so Tom DeLay's leadership is something the president respects, and the president supports Tom DeLay as the leader of the Republican Party in the House" ("Meet the Press," NBC, 5/1).

TRIBAL ELDERS LAY DOWN THE LAW

Ex-Rep. Pete McCloskey (R-CA) on 5/1 said he and other GOP "elders are looking for a candidate to oppose" DeLay. McCloskey:

"Tom DeLay is an embarrassment to the Republican party." McCloskey is one of nine ex-Reps. who've "formed an informal group he called the 'revolt of the elders' to oppose congressman who they think are guilty of ethics violations" (Stewart, Houston Chronicle, 5/1).

LEAD ME TO VAIL!

The Lodge at Vail "was a major draw for big political donors in" Q1. Cong. members, led by Rep. Mike Oxley (R-OH) and Rep. Deborah Pryce (R-OH) "have tripled spending over the last four years to host fund-raisers in Vail, financing their journeys with money provided by donors." Companies like Morgan Stanley and Fannie Mae gave to leadership PACs, "which legally paid for gear, lift tickets and drinks for lawmakers."

Democracy 21 pres Fred Wertheimer: "In essence, the lobbyists are funding the trips. ... Leadership PACs should be abolished." Lawmakers and aides say "they need leadership PACs to support like-minded members of Congress." To "get the money, they need a reason for people to attend fund-raisers" (Forsythe/Jensen/Salant, Bloomberg, 5/2).