

Corporate giving not necessarily selfless

Letter to the Editor, *Des Moines Register*

November 14, 2005

Regarding your Nov. 5 editorial, "Big Oil Can Share its Big Profits": Encouraging oil companies to donate windfall profits to nonprofit fuel-fund programs reveals a problem with some kinds of corporate philanthropy. In this case, the largest profit margins ever recorded by a U.S. corporation, Exxon-Mobil, are being tapped for a small charitable donation.

Of course, we the taxpayers pay for Exxon-Mobil's charitable donations because they are tax-deductible for the corporate donor. Moreover, few corporations allocate more than 1 percent - much less 10 percent - of pretax profits to philanthropic contributions.

And finally, because corporations aren't required to fully disclose their charitable giving, some corporations, like Exxon-Mobil, make contributions to charities that look a lot like organizations serving the corporate sector. Exxon-Mobil is a noteworthy example for its support of "scientific" organizations that challenge the idea of global warming and fossil fuels' contribution to it.

Asking for a voluntary charitable contribution from Exxon-Mobil doesn't do the trick, even if the threat is public embarrassment over its riches. In this instance, congressional action against the windfall profiteers will be much more useful than offering Exxon-Mobil and others the public relations camouflage of a charitable contribution.

-Rick Cohen, executive director, National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, Washington D.C.