

Political pet tricks

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The problem described in the Trib's article on Pennsylvania state lawmakers' pet nonprofits extends beyond legislators funneling state government funds to nonprofits they have established or control ("Six lawmakers funnel \$29 million to pet nonprofits," April 24 and TribLIVE.com).

In most of these cases and in comparable ones involving federal legislators -- such as Republicans Tom DeLay, Rick Santorum, Ted Stevens and Bill Frist and Democrats Alan Mollohan and Blanche Lincoln -- these nonprofits also receive donations from individuals, corporations and lobbyists trying to curry favor with the people in charge of making government policy and allocating government program funds.

Special interests get to curry favor and buy invaluable "face time" without having to make the kinds of disclosures usually required under lobbying and campaign finance laws and regulations. The examples from the state of Pennsylvania and the somewhat more widely publicized nonprofits controlled by members of Congress amount to abuses of charity and philanthropy, doing damage to the trust and probity of the nonprofit sector.

This is a serious problem in need of more attention than it has gotten in state legislatures and in the U.S. Congress.

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