

## More links, more questions

Mollohan steers funds to nonprofits; the beneficiaries cultivate Mollohan

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"REPRESENTATIVE Alan Mollohan helped funnel at least \$179 million in U.S. government contracts over the last six years to companies that gave to the West Virginia Democrat's family-run charity, tax records and other documents show."

So reported Bloomberg this week.

"The money went to 21 companies and nonprofit groups that contributed \$225,427 to the Robert H. Mollohan Family Charitable Foundation in 2004 -- almost half of the charity's revenue, according to the documents."

It's the latest in a series of revelations about how Mollohan, a 12-term congressman, has used his clout on the House Appropriations Committee, which gives him the opportunity to "earmark" funds to foundations he set up in his district.

The foundations are correspondingly solicitous with respect to Mollohan's campaigns, family foundations, and business interests.

It appears that the nonprofits that benefited from Mollohan's earmarks have contributed almost \$400,000 to his re-election campaigns.

And those 21 companies and nonprofit groups also contributed to the congressman's foundation.

It raises most of its money from corporate sponsorship -- \$10,000 a hole -- of an annual golf outing at the Pete Dye Golf Club in Bridgeport, which the congressman, as secretary of the foundation, attends.

"The event gives company executives an opportunity to meet with him in a casual setting without having to report the donations as lobbying expenses," said Bloomberg.

" 'They are buying time, they are buying access, they are buying goodwill for their particular corporate needs,' said Rick Cohen executive director of the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, a Washington-based group that advocates strict ethical standards for charities."

The picture gets more incestuous still, others point out. The nonprofits that receive Mollohan earmarks are operationally influenced by a former Mollohan staffer.

Mollohan has also invested personal money with that staffer, who gets her salary from federal funds directed the nonprofits' way by Mollohan.

Mollohan is not the only member of Congress who faces questions about his funneling of money to pet nonprofits controlled by them. But such circularity does and should raise questions that are not going to go away.

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