

## Semantic Fog of U.S. Politics

# One Man's Campaign Contribution Is Another's Testimonial Dinner

Second of two articles

By Richard Harwood  
Washington Post Staff Writer

The financial practices of Washington's public men are badly blurred by the semantic fog of American politics.

One man's "testimonial gift" is another man's "campaign contribution." A "subsidy" account in one office, is a "re-election fund" in another.

Politicians themselves find it hard to make the necessary distinctions. President Johnson has said he assumed he was raising "campaign funds" at dinners in 1961 and 1963 which Sen. Thomas J. Dodd (D-Conn.) regarded as "testimonials."

This fuzziness is reflected in the regular flow of money between politicians and their financial sponsors in non-election years.

No Congressman had a re-election cam-

paign to finance last year, but dozens of them held fund-raising dinners.

The extent of this practice is suggested in the 1965 financial report of the Political Education Fund of the Building and Construction Trades Council.

Its benefactions included \$125 to Friends of Richard Bolling (D-Mo.); \$100 to the Roman Pucinski (D-Ill.) Testimonial Committee; \$300 to the L. Oliva Huot (D-N.H.) Birthday Reception Committee; \$100 to the Edward A. Garmatz (D-Md.) Maritime Award Reception; \$250 to the Samuel N. Friedel (D-Md.) Reception Committee; \$500 to the John H. Dent (D-Pa.) Testimonial Committee; \$250 to the David S. King (D-Utah) Testimonial Dinner; \$100 to the Thomas S. Foley (D-Wash.) Testimonial Dinner Committee.

The people who got the money inter-

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preted each gift in his own way. Bolling and King used it to pay off campaign debts. Rep. George Grider (D-Tenn.), a 1966 beneficiary of the Fund, put it into a bank account to finance trips back home to Memphis. The \$250 given in February to Rep. Morris K. Udall (D-Ariz.) became part of a \$30,000 testimonial endowment to subsidize a wide range of office expenses.

The people who gave the money made their own interpretations.

"I don't know what they do with it," said Fund Director Walter J. Mason. "As far as I'm concerned, it's for themselves. We give it in appreciation for assistance they have given us, for positions they take on issues, and simply to help them out."

There are many funds of this sort in Washington which are used to "help them out."

The Committee on American Leadership, made up largely of men with an interest in coal, gave \$50 in 1965 to a party for Ben Jensen, a defeated Republican Congressman from Iowa; \$50 to the King David testimonial dinner; \$100 to the District Committee for Sen. James Pearson (R-Kan.); \$400 to Friends of John Race (D-Wis.) Committee; \$250 to the John Dent Testimonial Committee; \$500 to the Everett Dirksen (R-Ill.) Dinner Committee; \$100 to the Arnold Olsen (D-Mont.) Dinner Com-

mittee; \$50 to the Sen. Frank Moss (D-Utah) Luncheon Committee; \$1000 to the Sen. Thruston B. Morton (R-Ky.) Dinner Committee; \$100 to the Walter Baring (D-Nev.) Re-election Campaign; and \$50 to the Thomas S. Foley Testimonial Dinner.

Like Mason of the construction workers, Robert E. Lee Hall, treasurer of the Leadership Committee, had no idea how the money was used.

### They Don't Ask How

"When we are asked to contribute," said Hall, whose office is at the National Coal Association, "we do not ask how the money is going to be spent. Nor have we ever earmarked a contribution for a particular purpose."

In its reports, the Committee describes each gift as a "contribution in recognition of leadership," which implies that there are no restrictions on the way in which the money can be used.

However described, the money is a form of subsidy to underwrite the political way of life in Washington. Most of it comes from people with a vested interest in public policy.

Contributors to the Udall Testimonial Fund, for example, included the construction workers, and the Truck Operators' Non-Partisan Committee.

Federal employees, whose standard of living depends largely on pay decisions made by Udall and other members of the House Post Office and Civil Serv-



ice Committee, contributed about \$3000.

Their contributions had to be classified as "gifts" because it is a crime punishable by a \$5000 fine and a three-year prison sentence for an individual Congressman to accept "political" contributions from Federal employees.

This prohibition has not prevented Federal employees from contributing heavily to "testimonials" for various members of the Post Office and Civil Service Committee, including Rep. James H. Morrison (D-La.) and Rep. Arnold Olsen (D-Mont.).

#### "Whole System Wrong"

"The whole system of political subsidies is wrong," says Udall. "We ought to completely change the system, but as long you have it, you have to play it the way it has been played in the past."

The \$30,000 Udall received is essential to meet the expenses of office, he said. It is underwriting his travels home, newsletters, TV and radio tapes, and similar costs.

"Not a penny of it is for my personal use," he said.

The distinctions between "personal" and "political" benefits are sometimes difficult to define, because a political investment is also an investment in the personal career and professional fortunes of a politician.

Former Vice-President Richard Nixon was attacked by Democrats in 1952 when it was discovered that his constituents in California had set up an \$18,000 "Nixon Fund" to underwrite Nixon's office and travel expenses. He was accused of a conflict of interest.

But many Congressmen apparently have a "Nixon Fund" of some sort to subsidize their way of life.

"I was not one of those who criticized Nixon for that," said Rep. Bolling. "The present system is ridiculous but a member of Congress simply can't meet his expenses of travel and so forth on the allowances he gets. Congress ought to give adequate travel allowances, but it doesn't have the guts."

#### "Allowances Too Small"

The explanation constantly given for accepting subsidies is that "political expenses" are heavy and Congressional allowances are "too small." But these are generalities.

The fact is that last year, 64 members of the Senate received cash refunds on the unused balance of their \$2400 stationery allowances. These refunds in many cases exceeded \$1,000 a year. Sen. Bourke Hickenlooper (R-Iowa) received a refund of \$2,024.67 last year; Sen. Margaret Chase Smith (R-Maine) received \$1,822.01.

The problems of travel are sometimes exaggerated, too. In addition to six government-paid round trips home,

Indiana's two Senators, Birch Bayh and Vance Hartke, received subsidies for about 20 trips each from the Indiana State Democratic Central Committee.

Each of the 21 Democrats up for re-election to the Senate this year received about \$5,000 in subsidies in 1965 from the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee. The money was intended primarily, but not entirely, for travel.

In addition, a number of congressmen received travel subsidies from the AFL-CIO's Committee on Political Education. The COPE report for 1965 and 1966 lists "travel contributions" of \$500 to Reps. Bolling, William M. Hungate (D-Mo.), Grider and William R. Anderson (D-Tenn.), Ken Hechler (D-W.Va.), Ken W. Dyal (D-Calif.), Paul J. Krebs (D-N.J.). The travel subsidies to Senators Jennings Randolph (D-W.Va.) and Ross B. (D-Tenn.) totaled \$1,000 each.

Other travel subsidies are available, too. Sen. Quentin Burdick (D-N.D.) uses the surplus from his 1964 election campaign as a travel fund. Sen. Roman Hruska (R-Neb.) has done the same. Sen. William Proxmire (D-Wis.) put a \$7000 surplus last year into an office expense fund and reported the money as ordinary income.

#### Use Government Planes

Some Congressmen get home on Government planes. On other occasions their expenses are paid by the Committees on which they serve or by groups they address. A number of Congressmen commute free on planes owned by private corporations.

"If anybody finds the travel allowance too small," said Sen. John Williams (R-Del.), "he ought to support an increase in the government allowance. I would favor that."

But most Congressmen say that the political risks are too great, that voters at home "would not understand."

There are political risks, however, in the present system of private subsidies, as Sen. Thomas J. Dodd (D-Conn.) has discovered.

"When people give you money," says Williams, "they expect something."

This truth has been demonstrated within the past week with the AFL-CIO announcement of a boycott of upcoming Democratic fund-raising events.

The union said the decision was in retaliation for the failure of the Democratic Party to deliver legislation sought by the AFL-CIO.

Sen. Warren Magnuson (D-Wash.), who runs the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, disagrees with the Williams point of view.

"When people make contributions, they aren't trying to buy anything," he said. "They are simply trying to keep in office people who think the way they do."

Udall takes the same position on contributions from Federal employees.

"They didn't contribute to me to change my vote on Federal pay bills, because my position is well known," he says. "I am generally in agreement with them."

William C. Doherty, former lobbyist for the Federal letter carriers organization, has said that "testimonial" giving

is one of the few forms of political action available to civil servants.

"About all we can do," he said, "is say 'thank you' to people in Congress. And that's what we have always done: 'thank you,' 'thank you,' 'thank you.'"

Whatever the rationalizations by those who give and those who take, the "system" poses problems and raises ethical issues which the Senate Com-

mittee on Standards and Conduct will have to consider in its investigation of Sen. Dodd.

One member of the Committee, Sen. Eugene McCarthy (D-Minn.) has suggested that the dilemma facing the Committee is best expressed in the Biblical quotation of Christ: "He who is without sin among you, cast the first stone."