

POLITICS & POLICY

Latest Attraction: Spielberg Hosts Specter

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Given the way money usually flows through the pipeline from Hollywood to Washington, Sen. Arlen Specter's call to movie director Steven Spielberg was somewhat unusual.

The Pennsylvania Republican, who ran unsuccessfully for his party's presidential nomination last year, requested that Mr. Spielberg, the creator of the movie industry's biggest hits (his newest, "The Lost World" had the strongest opening of any movie in history), host a fund-raiser for him. Mr. Spielberg, along with his partners in DreamWorks SKG, contributed \$601,300 to federal candidates in the last election, with the largest donations going to the Democratic Party. Mr. Spielberg is known as one of President Clinton's most stalwart Hollywood supporters. Another problem for Mr. Specter: His grilling of law professor Anita Hill during Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas's confirmation hearings had angered many Hollywood liberals.

But the movie maker had reason to greet the lawmaker's request warmly. And last Monday about 100 guests turned out for a \$500-a-person fund-raising fete for Mr. Specter's 1998 re-election campaign on the DreamWorks Lot at Universal City.

If the Spielberg-Specter pairing seems odd in Hollywood, it makes more sense in Washington, where Mr. Specter had recently helped Mr. Spielberg from his perch as the influential chairman of the appropriations subcommittee on labor, health and human services and education. Sen. Specter had championed a \$1 million appropriation for one of Mr. Spielberg's pet projects, the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation.

The Shoah project was established by the director after he filmed the Oscar-winning film "Schindler's List," an account of a group of Holocaust survivors. The goal of the project is to videotape and catalog 150,000 interviews with Holocaust survivors to provide a full testimony of the extermination of Jews during World War II. The Shoah foundation received the \$1 million in the appropriations bill passed by Congress last year. With Sen. Barbara Boxer, the California Democrat who enlisted him to push for the Shoah money, Sen. Specter personally presented Mr. Spielberg with the check when the director

Fund-Raiser

visited Washington last summer.

Opponents Put Up a Fight

The appropriation of public monies for a private cause of a Hollywood billionaire, however noble, didn't pass without a fight. Illinois Rep. Sidney Yates, a senior Democratic appropriator in the House, opposed the grant on grounds that the federal government shouldn't fund private foundations, especially when the United States Holocaust Memorial Council in Washington, which operates the Holocaust museum, depends on federal funding. "He [Mr. Spielberg] disagreed with me," recalls Mr. Yates, "and Specter sided with him."

The Forward, an influential newspaper in the Jewish community, also editorialized against the Shoah funding. "With all the claims these days on the shrinking public dollar," the newspaper opined, the Spielberg project didn't seem most in need of "government welfare funding."

Mr. Spielberg badly wanted government backing for the Shoah project, in part because he hoped it would encourage other governments, including Germany and Austria, to contribute (so far, none has). The project hasn't had any trouble attracting private contributions — it has raised more than \$45 million since 1994 and hopes to pull in \$50 million more. An array of wealthy contributors, including Ronald Perelman and Henry Kravis, have each



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given the Shoah project more than \$1 million. Mr. Spielberg contributed \$6 million through the Righteous Persons Foundation, which he also established in 1994 with profits from "Schindler's List." (Mr. Spielberg didn't take any personal profits from the film.) So far, more than 30,000 interviews with survivors have been completed in 43 countries, according to Shoah foundation spokesperson Kristie Macosko.

Sen. Specter fought for the appropriation, he says, because giving the project government backing makes it harder for extremists to argue that the Holocaust never happened. "It's a worthwhile expenditure," he says. "The million appropriation was relatively modest as these things go." The Omnibus Appropriations Committee Report states, "The conferees concur with the view that this direct grant will put the imprimatur of the U.S. government in a unique manner to repudiate any future claims that the Holocaust never occurred."

Both Sen. Specter and Mr. Spielberg deny that the DreamWorks fund-raiser held last week was tied directly to the help the senator gave the movie maker on the appropriation. "There's a personal relationship and shared values on a range of

issues," especially issues pertaining to Israel, says Andy Spahn, a DreamWorks executive who answered questions about the fund-raising reception on Mr. Spielberg's behalf.

Interest in Israel

However, Mr. Spahn adds that the friendship between Messrs. Spielberg and Specter was forged during the appropriations process when "they had an opportunity to work together during that time and further their relationship." Sen. Specter also says a shared interest in Israel, not the Shoah appropriation, was why he approached Mr. Spielberg to ask him to host the event.

Although Mr. Spielberg and his DreamWorks partners, former Walt Disney Co. executive Jeffrey Katzenberg and music titan David Geffen, often host fund-raising receptions for politicians, Mr. Spielberg had not done any prior fund-raising for

Sen. Specter and overwhelmingly favors Democratic candidates with his campaign gifts. In 1992, when Mr. Specter faced a tough re-election battle, Mr. Spielberg contributed \$14,500 to the Democratic Senato-

rial Campaign Committee, which backed the Pennsylvania Republican's opponent, Lynn Yeakel.

Some of Mr. Spielberg's critics view the fund-raiser with a jaundiced eye. When told about the DreamWorks bash, Joanne Rudoff, an archivist at the Fortunoff Video Archive at Yale University, says, "Oh, big surprise! A little quid pro quo!" The Fortunoff archive has also videotaped interviews with Holocaust survivors since 1978 and maintains an extensive Holocaust library. (The Fortunoff archive doesn't receive federal funding. It is privately funded and has received contributions from one of Mr. Spielberg's foundations.) Ms. Rudoff opposed the appropriation for Shoah. "Spielberg didn't need that million dollars," she says. "He just wanted the cachet of having government backing."

When informed about the fund-raiser, Rep. Yates utters, "Oh my goodness!," but declines further comment, saying, "I don't think any more need be said."

It's unclear how much the DreamWorks party actually raised for Sen. Specter. Though there were about 100 guests, including veteran movie industry lobbyist Jack Valenti, who was a co-host of the event, not everyone at the party necessarily contributed. (Another co-host was GOP Mayor Richard Riordan of Los Angeles.) No big stars turned out according to DreamWorks's Mr. Spahn, and Sen. Specter says he expects only a "modest return" from the evening. His last race in 1992 cost more than \$11 million, and the Pennsylvania Republican says he expects to have to spend more than that next year to win re-election.