



targeted in that 1990's effort who are benefiting from the very tactics they howled about back then. (That pattern sound familiar to anyone?)

### **HOW IT WORKS**

For those who don't yet understand, what the recent reports reveal is an effort to conceal from voters who was responsible for issuing the hit-mail. And because of loopholes in campaign finance laws, it's likely the effort will work.



*Bric and Reinke's opponents, the joint campaign of Philip and Carolyn Berlin.*

In short, what appears to have happened here is that someone who wants the Berlins to win the upcoming election either is a campaign consultant, or went to one. That consultant has relationships with other PACs and consultants, as many do, and they effectively trade donors.

To help explain the process, let me describe a fictional scenario. Mary Contrary is running for council in Jonesville, and slides in parks are a big concern among voters there. Jonesville voters hate slides. But "We Build Slides, Inc." the world's leader in slide manufacturing, believes Mary Contrary will be very friendly to their products and insist the city buy them if she's elected. The corporate bosses realize that giving Mary's campaign \$5,000 will be pointed out by all of her less friendly opponents. It could be embarrassing for her, and even lose her support from slide-hating voters.

Meanwhile, 500 miles away in Smithburgh, Tony Baloney is running for council against Peter Perfect. The folks who support Tony Baloney, or perhaps even Tony himself, have \$5,000 to spend on a scandalous piece of hit-mail attacking Peter Perfect. Trouble is, the scandalous accusations they hope will hurt Peter's campaign aren't entirely true. Tony and/or his friends don't want their names associated with the hit. Also, if Peter Perfect wins despite the hit-piece, everyone wants to be able to pat Peter on the back and say they were rooting for him all along.

So, Tony Baloney and/or his friends go to a consultant. His name is Sam Slick. Sam Slick runs several PACs, which are often just organizations that exist only on paper. Sam has worked with the leaders of other PACs just like his. He suggests Tony or his friends give \$5,000 to the "We Like Honest Politicians" PAC, run by a consultant Sam works with a lot. That PAC, in turn, donates \$5,000 to the "Californians Against Crooked Government" PAC. Then, "Californians Against Crooked Government" donates \$5,000 to Mary Contrary's campaign way over in Jonesville. Mary has her money, and there is no way to connect it to a slide manufacturer.

Next, We Build Slides, Inc. donates \$5,000 to a PAC, this one called the “Honesty and Integrity Group.” It’s run by another friend of Sam Slick’s. Honesty and Integrity Group then donates \$5,000 to a PAC run by Sam Slick called “Straight Talk from Politicians.” Finally, Straight Talk from Politicians pays \$5,000 for literature that attacks Peter Perfect in Smithburgh.

Who gave money to whom, and why, will likely never be uncovered. When Sam Slick’s Straight Talk from Politicians PAC reports who paid for the literature, we’ll only see the cash came from another PAC, which got it from a slide manufacturer.

At best, if all the layers are pierced before election day, voters considering the choice between Tony Baloney and Peter Perfect only know that We Build Slides, Inc. way over in Jonesville for some reason gave money to help defeat Peter Perfect in Smithburgh. And that’s the situation we have in Burbank today.

It’s called “money laundering,” though not in the conventional sense of a criminal enterprise. But as with criminals, in the political context the goal of laundering is to hide the true sources of money.

#### ***HIT-PIECE FINANCCERS CONNECTED TO BURBANK?***

As for the newly revealed donors here in Burbank, only one has even a vague connection to the city. Clear Channel, an advertising and broadcast radio firm operates a talk radio station in the Media District. But in a call to the station, a woman who declined to tell me her name said no one there is involved in or “really even aware of” Burbank’s municipal election. I was referred to Clear Channel’s Texas headquarters, where the \$3,000 donation was reported to have come from. Calls to the Texas office turned into a round robin of transfers, with no one located who was authorized to confirm or explain the donation.

BA Studios is the company that owns and operates a studio in Hollywood known as “The Lot.” Calls to that company led to a similar series of brief, confused contacts that ultimately led to the promise “somebody will call you back when we find someone who knows about this.”

#### ***THE BIGGEST CONTRIBUTOR***

The largest of the three contributions came from the “slate mail” company, Coalition for Senior Citizen Security. Slate mailers file reports with the state just as PACs do. Their products are those sheets you get every campaign season that typically offer a list of candidates for virtually any elected office supposedly “endorsed “ because the candidates support the sender’s claimed or implied priorities. What few voters realize is that candidates typically pay to be featured

on slate mailers, a facet of the campaign industry that some experts have told me is among the most profitable.

Given a slate mail organization called "Save Beavers in Burbank," a candidate who advocates force feeding rat poison to every beaver in the city could land on the group's slate mailer of endorsements as long as they write a check.

As described in the hypothetical example earlier, the Coalition for Senior Citizen Security has supported campaigns organized by the Good Government Committee PAC and the Coalition for Responsible Leadership PAC. Sometimes two in the trio have contributed to the third.

An example of this confusing game of musical chairs is seen in state campaign finance records covering June 2006, when the Coalition for Responsible Leadership donated \$1,000 to the campaign of a hopeful chasing election to the state assembly. Donating to the same candidate was Clear Channel Worldwide, the PAC that this month donated funds to the Coalition for Responsible Leadership to oppose Bric and Reinke.

The assembly candidate lost in the June 6 primary. According to finance reports filed with the state, about three weeks later that same candidate then donated \$2,000 back to the Coalition for Responsible Leadership, twice what it had received earlier in the month. The candidate didn't report donating any money back to Clear Channel's PAC.

According to other state campaign filings, last year the Coalition for Senior Citizen Security group, the one that this month reportedly paid Coalition for Responsible Leadership for the Bric/Reinke literature, actually *received* \$1,500 from the Responsible Leadership PAC, that time to support yet another candidate for the state assembly.

***CONFUSING? IT'S SUPPOSED TO BE.***

There is one unique aspect to Clear Channel's \$3,000 donation to the Coalition for Responsible Leadership. Save for a small number of Clear Channel Worldwide's donations to other Clear Channel PACs, and a handful of contributions in a battle over term limits in Los Angeles, the amount given to produce literature slamming Bric and Reinke is much more than Clear Channel donated to any other candidate or political cause through 2005 and 2006.

Clear Channel Worldwide coughed up money in more than 130 races and ballot initiative battles throughout the state in 2006, and also gave to a variety of party organizations. From Los Angeles city council races, to state assembly and senate contests, and even in races for judicial seats, the vast majority of the donations were for \$500 to \$1,000. A handful were given more than \$1,000. Even

in the Lt. Governor's race, Clear Channel Worldwide donated just \$2,500, one of the small handful to break the \$1k ceiling. But to help the Berlins and oppose their challengers, Clear Channel Worldwide donated \$3,000.

Stay tuned and check back here, because I'm expecting some other developments on this story in the coming days.

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