

Rep. Roy Blunt: Ties to Special Interests Leave Him Unfit to Lead

Executive Summary



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Executive Summary

Rep. Roy Blunt (R-Mo.), the acting majority leader of the U.S. House of Representatives, was a high school history teacher before he was a congressman. But any idealistic civics teacher would blanch at describing Blunt's sprint to the top of the House Republican leadership. Blunt has exchanged favors with special interests, relied heavily on the unsavory fundraising apparatus of indicted Rep. Tom DeLay (R-Tex.), and passionately embraced the corrupted culture of the Washington, D.C. lobbying world, including cozying up to super-lobbyist turned admitted felon Jack Abramoff.

With DeLay having exited his majority leader's post, a permanent successor will be elected soon. As acting majority leader, Blunt is a strong, and many would say, natural contender to take over from his mentor and the man who has guided his rapid ascent into the senior ranks of U.S. political life. But precisely because of that – because the student has aped the master so well – Blunt is now irrevocably tainted by the same ethical quagmire that has overtaken DeLay.

In what has been described as Washington's worst corruption scandal in decades, recent months have seen headline after headline demonstrate the tawdry union of money and politics in the nation's capital. As one observer has said, the power of money drives out the power of ideas. Polls show Americans of all stripes not only increasingly concerned about a rising tide of sleaze, but also increasingly restive for change.

Thus, as House Republicans prepare to name their next majority leader for the body the Framers meant to be closest to the people, there can be no doubt of the urgent need for reform. Blunt, however, has disqualified himself from consideration by compiling a record that convincingly shows him to be nothing of the reformer the times now demand. Rather, with DeLay, Blunt has stretched the already deformed boundaries of propriety further than they have been pushed before.

In this report, Public Citizen compiles a disturbing dossier on Blunt, based on original research and a comprehensive compilation of news accounts of recent months. In the end, what emerges is a portrait of a legislative leader who not only has surrendered his office to the imperative of moneyed interests, but who has also done so with disturbing zeal and efficiency.

Section I: Blunt's Strong Ties to K Street

Blunt has been one of the central figures in building the "K Street Project," an alliance between corporate lobbyists and the Republican majority in Congress. In this partnership, corporations, trade associations and lobbying firms are pressured to hire only Republicans. Those lobbyists then help the Republican leadership to "whip on the outside" – to get Republican members of the House to vote for the leadership's legislative agenda. The lobbyists also raise enormous sums of money from their clients to ensure that Republicans remain the majority in Congress.

For this fealty, the leadership grants the lobbyists access to the decision-makers and provides legislative favors for their clients. After House Speaker Dennis Hastert voiced concern in 1999

that there was “a vacuum in the outreach to K Street,” DeLay tapped Blunt to be his new right hand man, as chief deputy whip. It paid off personally for Blunt as well.

- **Seventy-three percent of contributions received by Blunt’s political committees since 1999 have come from business PACs and from lobbyists who very often control the PACs.** Of the \$12.8 million Blunt raised through the present, \$9.2 million has come from business PACs and lobbyists.
- **Blunt has received nearly \$429,000 from Capitol Hill lobbyists since 1999.**
- **43 percent – 13 out of 30 – of Blunt’s biggest contributors have hired his former aides as their lobbyists.**
- **Ten of Blunt’s biggest contributors have hired the Alexander Strategy Group (ASG) as their lobbying firm.** The firm has been close to Blunt, as Blunt’s committees have paid ASG \$485,485 from 1999 to 2002 for fundraising and consulting services. ASG’s clients, meanwhile, have funneled \$581,866 into Blunt’s committees since 1999. ASG was forced to shut its doors in January 2006, because of its tight connections connections with lobbyist Jack Abramoff and the embattled DeLay.
- **Top Blunt aides have landed at Washington lobbying firms.** Between 2001 and 2005, at least six of Blunt’s senior aides went to work for lobbying firms in Washington, including Gregg Hartley, his former chief of staff. Three of these aides have represented “Baby Bell” telephone companies, which have been the biggest industry contributors to Blunt’s political committees.

Section II: Blunt’s Corporate-Subsidized Travel

Blunt has made an art form of exploiting a loophole in Federal Election Commission (FEC) rules that allows party honchos to order up corporate jets, typically in order to attend fundraisers around the country, and then repay the jet owners only a fraction of the cost. Moreover, most of these companies have made campaign contributions to Blunt that are greater than the airfare reimbursements they have received from his political committees – in effect, reimbursing Blunt for his reimbursements to them, and resulting in free travel.

- **Blunt and candidates he has supported through his leadership PAC have taken at least 140 subsidized flights on corporate jets since 2001.** Blunt personally flew on at least 99 of the flights. In effect, the companies that own the jets have handsomely subsidized the political activities of Blunt and the candidates he supports. Blunt’s political committees have reimbursed the jets’ owners only \$193,744 for the trips, which represents the cost of first class plane tickets, as permitted by campaign finance regulations. But Public Citizen estimates the actual costs of leasing these jets at the more expensive charter rate was, depending on the method, between \$925,000 and \$2 million. These estimates are based on the going rates for chartering a jet.

- **Blunt’s reimbursements to companies for subsidized jet travel were often dwarfed by their campaign contributions to him.** The 23 companies that have provided two or more flights to Blunt have contributed an average of \$27,916 to his campaign committees (only three of the companies did not contribute at all). Blunt has reimbursed these companies an average of \$7,314 for airfare. Only four of these companies received more in airfare reimbursements from Blunt than they made in contributions to his political committees.
- **The corporations that have flown Blunt around the country acknowledge that they make their jets available in exchange for special access to lawmakers.** BellSouth, which has shuttled Blunt or candidates financed by his leadership PAC 20 times since 2000, furnishes its jets to “people who are friendly to us,” and those “important to us,” a company spokesman said. “They could be in a position to help or hinder legislative action that might be beneficial.”
- **Blunt traveled aboard the jet of businessman Brent Wilkes, who is the subject of a Department of Justice investigation.** Companies owned by Brent Wilkes, identified as a co-conspirator in the bribery plea agreement of former Rep. Randy “Duke” Cunningham (R-Calif.), has provided four subsidized trips to Blunt’s PACs. The total reimbursement for the subsidized trips was only \$2,520, half the \$5,000 that Blunt’s PAC received from Wilkes.
- **Blunt evidently accepted free trips from airlines.** Perhaps in appreciation of Blunt’s post-Sept. 11 work to deliver them a taxpayer bailout, the airlines evidently provided Blunt with what amounts to a choice perk. On 16 occasions, beginning with the reporting period covering Sept. 11, 2001, through Nov. 5, 2002, Blunt’s soft-money PAC reported nearly \$45,000 in “in-kind” contributions from major airlines. Blunt also reported in-kind contributions of \$4,881 from Philip Morris and \$1,440 from U.S. Tobacco, which also appear to have been free airfare.

Section III: Blunt Has Performed Special Favors for His Big Contributors

In his relatively short tenure in Congress, Blunt has demonstrated a willingness to intervene on behalf of industries and corporations that contribute heavily to his political committees, even when these favors entail taxpayer subsidies that would seemingly conflict with his professed conservative ideology.

He has been an attentive advocate for the “Baby Bells,” the local phone providers that emerged from the breakup of AT&T, and which have contributed nearly \$540,000 to his campaigns since 1999. Blunt inserted a special favor for tobacco giant Altria into a bill creating the Department of Homeland Security, which was later removed due to an outcry. Altria has contributed at least \$177,000 to Blunt’s political committees in recent years. He succeeded in getting inserted into a spending bill for the Iraq war a special provision for domestic shippers, such as United Parcel Service (UPS) and Federal Express, which have contributed nearly \$129,000 to him since 1999. And Blunt has twice led the bailouts for U.S. airlines, which have given more than \$102,000 to his political committees in direct contributions and free airfare.

Baby Bells

- **The Baby Bells have been Blunt's most generous donors.** The local phone legacies of AT&T – BellSouth, Qwest, SBC and Verizon – have contributed nearly \$540,000 to Blunt's political committees since 1999. SBC, which has contributed nearly \$210,000 to Blunt and his PACs since 1999, has even retained Blunt's son, Andrew, as a Missouri lobbyist.
- **The Bells have employed former Blunt staffers.** Three of six former Blunt staffers whom Public Citizen has identified as becoming federal lobbyists have represented Baby Bells, including Blunt's former chief of staff, Gregg Hartley.
- **Blunt, in turn, has been a vocal advocate for the Bells' causes.** He co-sponsored the "Tauzin-Dingell" bill, the Baby Bells' top legislative priority, which would have exempted the companies from sharing their lines with competitors. He co-signed a letter to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) demanding that the agency provide justification for a rule requiring the Baby Bells to lease portions of their networks to competitors. Blunt dubbed the day the FCC refused to grant the Baby Bells their wishes on all line sharing issues "Black Thursday." Blunt has twice issued timely press releases taking the Bells' position when commenting on rulings by the FCC or the courts.

Tobacco Companies

- **Tobacco companies, especially Altria, have given generously to Blunt.** Tobacco companies have given Blunt nearly \$259,000 in cash and possibly thousands more in subsidized corporate jet travel since 1999. Altria Corp. (including subsidiaries Philip Morris, Kraft Foods and former subsidiary Miller Brewing) has given nearly \$217,000.
- **Altria Corp. employs Blunt's wife and son.** Abigail Blunt, the former Abigail Perlman, has been Blunt's wife since October 2003. She was one of Altria's lobbyists to the House of Representatives as recently as the first half of 2005. Blunt's son, Andrew, lobbies for Altria in Missouri.
- **Tobacco companies have shared their jets with Blunt.** Blunt and candidates whose travel he has paid for through his leadership PAC have enjoyed the luxury of subsidized flights aboard the corporate jets of Philip Morris, R.J. Reynolds and U.S. Smokeless Tobacco on at least 10 occasions. Blunt's political committees have reimbursed the companies only \$10,584, based on commercial first class airfare rates – providing him with a hefty subsidy from charter, or actual usage, rates. Moreover, Blunt's soft money PAC, now defunct, also reported a \$4,881 in-kind contribution from Philip Morris, most likely for air travel.
- **Altria has helped Blunt staffers travel abroad.** The American Turkish Council, on whose board an Altria executive sits, shuttled four Blunt staffers to Turkey between 2001 and 2004 at a combined cost of nearly \$22,000. Two of the trips, "fact finding" missions undertaken simultaneously by then-Blunt Chief of Staff Gregg Hartley and later Blunt Chief of Staff Amy Field, were specifically underwritten, in part, by Philip Morris and Pfizer.

- **Blunt tried to slip a favor for Altria into the Homeland Security bill.** On Nov. 13, 2002, the same day Blunt was named House majority whip and just hours before House members were to vote on a bill creating the Department of Homeland Security, Blunt instructed his staff to insert language favored by Altria into the bill, which would have made it harder to sell tobacco products over the Internet and would have cracked down on the sale of contraband cigarettes. House Speaker Hastert removed the provision upon learning of it.
- **Altria was generous to Blunt in the days before the Homeland Security vote.** From Oct. 18 to 28, 2002, Blunt's leadership PAC received 37 contributions totaling \$30,900 from employees of Altria and its Philip Morris, Kraft Foods, and Miller Brewing units. Thirty-one of the contributions were received on Oct. 25, a day on which the PAC also received the then-maximum \$1,000 each from three Altria lobbyists: Lindsay Hooper, Walter Steward and Franklin Polk.

Shipping Companies

- **Domestic shipping companies have generously aided Blunt and his family.** UPS has been among Blunt's most faithful contributors, donating \$96,200 in cash and in-kind services to his political committees since 1999. Federal Express has given \$32,499 to the lawmaker. Blunt's son, Andrew, has been employed as a UPS lobbyist in Missouri since September 2002. UPS also furnished a Boeing 727 airplane to Blunt and DeLay to shuttle lobbyists, political supporters and aides to a September 2000 party in Las Vegas. UPS estimated the cost of providing its jet at \$30,000 to \$50,000, which it said would represent an in-kind contribution to DeLay's PAC.
- **Blunt pushed a special favor for UPS and Federal Express in an Iraq war funding bill.** In April 2003, amid deliberations over a \$79 billion spending bill for Iraq, Blunt convinced Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Ted Stevens (R-Alaska) to insert a provision prohibiting foreign-owned shipping companies such as DHL from receiving lucrative military contracts. Stevens' measure also called for an administrative law judge to rule on a petition filed by UPS and Federal Express that claimed a subsidiary of German-owned DHL Worldwide Express was operating illegally in the United States. A federal administrative law judge ruled in favor of DHL.

Airlines

- **Airlines have given generously to Blunt.** Four companies have contributed \$102,182 in cash and in-kind services to Blunt's political committees since 1999. The airlines' generosity has included nearly \$45,000 in 16 in-kind contributions, which were likely free air travel. The contributions occurred in the reporting period that included the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks through the 2002 election.
- **Blunt led the effort to secure a \$15 billion airline bailout bill after the Sept. 11 attacks.** Blunt met with airline executives a week after the Sept. 11 attacks, then immediately encouraged the White House to endorse a multi-billion dollar aid package. On Sept. 21 – 10

days after the attacks – Congress approved a measure that critics decried as far too generous, providing the airlines with \$5 billion in cash and \$10 billion in loan guarantees.

- **Blunt shepherded a second airline bailout bill in 2003 worth billions.** Another \$3.2 billion in aid to the airlines was included in a supplemental appropriations bill providing money for the war in Iraq, and was approved by the House in April 2003. The White House deemed the amount “excessive,” and Rep. Jeff Flake (R-Ariz.) complained that the aid package would simply encourage the industry to hire “more lobbyists” to seek future rounds of taxpayer-financed welfare. Flake offered an amendment that would have limited the airline package to \$1.1 billion. Blunt intervened, persuading Flake to withdraw by offering to address larger issues affecting the airline industry later on. After negotiations with the Senate, the package climbed to \$3.8 billion.

Section IV: DeLay and Blunt Joined at the Hip

Nobody is more responsible for Blunt’s rapid rise to the Republican leadership than DeLay. The Texan began advising Blunt at the outset of his congressional career, chose him for his first leadership post and availed Blunt of his fundraising operation.

- **DeLay facilitated Blunt’s rise.** After Blunt arrived in Washington in 1997 to start his congressional career, DeLay took the newcomer under his wing. He suggested that Blunt run for the freshman slot on the Republican Steering Committee, rather than seeking election as freshman class president. Blunt followed DeLay’s advice and won.
- **Blunt tapped DeLay’s fundraising machine.** To raise money for his political committees, Blunt hired the Alexander Strategy Group, which was founded by former DeLay Chief of Staff Ed Buckham. He also hired Jim Ellis, who managed two PACs tied to DeLay. (Ellis has since been indicted, along with DeLay, for money laundering in Texas in connection with his management of Texans for a Republican Majority, or TRMPAC, which was founded by DeLay). Blunt’s PACs paid Alexander Strategy Group \$485,485 from 1999 to 2002, and Blunt’s federal PAC paid Ellis at least \$94,000 from 2003 to 2005.
- **At least one of Blunt’s PACs operated out of the same town house as an illegal soft money operation connected to DeLay operatives.** In 1999, Blunt’s soft money PAC made rent payments and reimbursements for supplies to the U.S. Family Network (USFN), at 132 D. St. in Washington, D.C. Buckham and Ellis operated out of the house. USFN was the recipient of a \$500,000 soft money check from the National Republican Congressional Committee (NRCC) in October 1999, whose finance chair was Abigail Perlman, who became Blunt’s wife in 2003. The money was solicited by Buckham, then a USFN contractor. The USFN subsequently made a secret \$300,000 transfer to Americans for Economic Growth, which used the money to run commercials attacking Democratic congressional candidates. In 2004, the FEC fined the NRCC \$280,000 in connection with its transfer to the USFN.
- **Political committees controlled by DeLay and Blunt have swapped funds.** DeLay’s PACs have transferred \$165,000 to Blunt’s PACs. Blunt’s committees have contributed \$20,000 to DeLay’s legal defense fund and \$17,000 to a charity controlled by DeLay. A DeLay PAC

also contributed \$50,000 to the Missouri Republican Party to aid Blunt's son Matt's race to be secretary of state.

- **Blunt and DeLay worked together on RNC convention fetes in 2000 and repaid donors with a trip to Las Vegas.** Blunt and DeLay coordinated festivities at the 2000 Republican National Convention, then organized a trip to Las Vegas to thank the large contributors who had anted up nearly \$1 million for convention events. UPS furnished a Boeing 727 airplane to Blunt and DeLay to shuttle lobbyists, political supporters and aides to the September 2000 party. The in-kind donation was estimated at \$30,000 to \$50,000.
- **Blunt has helped DeLay's indicted PAC manager.** Ellis, who managed Blunt's political committees from their start, was indicted in September 2004. Rather than distancing himself from the allegations of Ellis's illegal behavior, Blunt increased his support of Ellis. In June 2005, Blunt's federal PAC contributed \$10,000 to Ellis's legal defense fund. Blunt also increased monthly fees to Ellis for serving as his PAC consultant – from \$3,000 a month in 2004 to \$4,000 a month in 2005.
- **DeLay's PAC contracted with a consulting firm to aid Blunt.** A contract between DeLay's PAC, Americans for a Republican Majority (ARMPAC), and a media consulting firm, Red Sea LLC, called for the firm to assist Blunt, as well as DeLay.

Section V: With DeLay, Blunt Was in League with Felon and Former Lobbyist Jack Abramoff

Membership in DeLay's inner circle carried the privilege of consorting with Jack Abramoff, the DeLay confidant and former super-lobbyist who has pleaded guilty to fraud, tax evasion and conspiracy to bribe public officials in Washington. Separately, he pleaded guilty to fraud in his purchase of a Florida company that operated floating casinos.

- **Abramoff and his clients have been generous to Blunt.** Abramoff was one of only two donors to give Blunt's federal PAC the maximum \$5,000, reported in its first FEC filing in 1999. Abramoff subsequently made three additional contributions to Blunt, bringing his total to \$8,500.
- **Blunt went to bat for an Abramoff Indian gambling client.** In May 2003, Abramoff lobbyist Todd Boulanger drafted a letter to Interior Secretary Gale Norton warning that “we hold you accountable” to prevent “reservation shopping” by the Jena Choctaw Tribe of Louisiana. The Louisiana Coushatta tribe, an Abramoff client, was fighting the Interior Department's recognition of the Jenas, because they would provide competition for the Coushattas' casinos. A toned-down version of Boulanger's letter, bearing the signatures of Blunt, DeLay and House Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.), was delivered to Norton in June of that year. Blunt signed two other letters to Norton opposing the Jena Choctaw's efforts to open a casino.
- **Blunt provided access to Abramoff and his employees.** On at least four occasions in 2000 and 2001, Blunt or his aides met with Abramoff or other representatives of his law firm, in

connection with Abramoff's representation of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). The CNMI, which has "political union" status with the United States, employed Abramoff to beat back a movement to impose U.S. labor standards on it, including the minimum wage. At least one of these meetings was between Blunt and a member of Abramoff's Mariana lobbying team.

- **Blunt's former chief of staff recruited Abramoff to work for Cassidy & Associates.** In March 2004, after Abramoff was fired by the law firm Greenberg Traurig for activities for which he later pleaded guilty, he was hired by Cassidy & Associates, a lobbying firm. Gregg Hartley, Blunt's confidante and former chief of staff turned Cassidy lobbyist, recruited Abramoff to the firm.
- **Blunt enjoyed "Friend of Owner" free meal status at Abramoff's restaurant.** Abramoff owned Signatures, a pricey restaurant near Capitol Hill, where he maintained a list of individuals who could dine for free. Blunt was among the lawmakers given this "Friend of Owner" status.

Section VI: Blunt's Political Empire Benefits His Family

Roy Blunt's political success has been instrumental in his sons' blazing ascents to the top of Missouri's political and lobbying cultures, which in turn has created new opportunities for both moneyed interests and other politicians to curry favor with the House leader. Blunt, along with his colleagues and lobbyists with business before him, have helped fill the coffers of son Matt's political committees. Meanwhile, son Andrew took only two years to build a lobbying practice that was the envy of his most established lobbying colleagues.

- **Contributions by Blunt and Washington, D.C.-based lobbyists and corporate executives have helped Matt Blunt twice win statewide election.** Shortly after ascending to chief deputy whip, Blunt began supporting his son Matt's secretary of state campaign. Roy Blunt's soft money leadership PAC contributed \$100,000 to the Missouri Republican Party in June, 2000. The party then spent \$160,000 on behalf of Matt Blunt's campaign. Matt Blunt's 2004 campaign for governor was aided by more than \$651,000 from his father's soft money committee, and another \$30,000 from nearly three dozen Washington lobbyists.
- **Blunt's Congressional colleagues have contributed significantly to his son.** Eighty-four House Republican lawmakers, 38 percent of the caucus, contributed more than \$65,000 in 2000 to Matt Blunt's campaign for secretary of state.
- **Andrew Blunt rose to the top of the Missouri lobbying world thanks to his father's donors.** Andrew Blunt was 25 when he graduated from law school in 2001. By early 2003, his lobbying clients included such heavyweights as Philip Morris, Burlington Northern Santa Fe, UPS and SBC. These are four of Roy Blunt's top eight corporate contributors since 1999. The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* in 2005 characterized the rise of Blunt's lobbying career as "meteoric."

- **Andrew Blunt worked for one of Rep. Blunt’s chief fundraisers.** While in law school in 2000, Andrew Blunt was employed as a “senior consultant” by Thompson Communications, which has worked for Rep. Blunt and Matt Blunt. This political consulting and fundraising company has received \$2.5 million from Rep. Blunt’s political committees since 2001.