

June 4, 2009

EDITORIAL

PMA's Friends

The criminal investigation into the lucrative universe of military defense lobbying is wisely digging deeper into the Capitol Hill trough. After federal investigators subpoenaed his files and staff aides, Representative Peter Visclosky has taken the unusual, but still insufficient, step of surrendering his subcommittee gavel while a defense spending bill is legislated.

Mr. Visclosky, an Indiana Democrat, was a major beneficiary of political donations from the PMA Group, the defense lobbying firm that shut itself down after being raided by federal agents.

The congressman insists that there were absolutely no quid-pro-quo violations in the millions in contracts he earmarked for PMA clients. But temporarily yielding the gavel for one bill — thick as it is with defense goodies — is hardly enough. Mr. Visclosky should step down as chairman of his defense subcommittee until the PMA investigation is completed.

The House Democratic leadership should have the gumption to open its own ethics inquiry into members who awarded rich contracts to PMA's clients and received handsome political donations from a grateful roster. Speaker Nancy Pelosi is reportedly at odds with her majority leader, Steny Hoyer, who wants to defuse Republican criticism with an ethics committee resolution. The speaker would be wise to get ahead of the scandal.

The list of PMA's pals is topped by Mr. Visclosky, Representative John Murtha, the powerful defense appropriations subcommittee chairman, and Representative James Moran. But it doesn't stop there. Since 1998, PMA doled out more than \$40 million in donations to members of Congress. Last year, more than 100 lawmakers earmarked \$300 million in contracts for PMA's clients.

It is a sordid and far-too-common tale: PMA's top lobbyists began as House appropriations staffers and then capitalized on their connections and savvy to strike it rich in the private sector. Still the full story needs to be laid out before the public of how this money roundelay worked — from contractor to lawmaker, with the American taxpayer always footing the bill.

Copyright 2009 The New York Times Company

[Privacy Policy](#) | [Search](#) | [Corrections](#) | [RSS](#) | [First Look](#) | [Help](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Work for Us](#) | [Site Map](#)