

## Pay-to-play changing landscape

Now that former state Sen. John Lynch and his business partner John Westlake have pleaded guilty to corruption charges and tax evasion, it is important for my fellow residents of the Jersey Shore to understand the nexus between John Lynch and our local politicians, developers and their professionals. Just as importantly, we need to understand the impact of these relationships and how it has affected the quality of life in our shore communities.

In the movie, "All the President's Men," actor Hal Holbrook portrays the Washington insider Deep Throat who continually states "follow the money." If we follow that lead, it takes us to two political action committees which have had a tremendous influence over our politicians, some who are already guilty of corruption. "New Directions Through Responsible Leadership," a Lynch PAC - co-chaired by Westlake and John Hoffman of the Wilentz, Goldman, and Spitzer law firm - has raised millions of dollars since 2000. The bulk of those dollars have come from people or companies doing redevelopment projects throughout the state and in our hometowns.

Developers like K Hovnanian, the Gale Co., Mack-Cali, PRC, Jack Morris, Applied Development, Matzel and Mumford, and others have contributed significantly to this PAC, and it is no coincidence they are all doing major development projects in towns like Long Branch, Matawan, Asbury Park, Keyport, West Long Branch, Belmar and my hometown of Red Bank.

In addition, engineering firms such as Maser Consulting, Birdsall Engineering, Schoor DePalma, T&M Associates, and Najarian Associates are among the local firms who have been major contributors for years. Again, it is of no surprise these firms are either employed by our towns or are working on behalf of the developers.

The other PAC called the Monmouth County Council of Democratic Leaders - formed in 1999 and co-chaired by the respective law partners of Mayor Ed McKenna of Red Bank and Mayor Ken Pringle of Belmar - has been in sync with the Lynch PAC for many years. Not only has this PAC received contributions from the same developers and professionals, but it has also received direct monies from New Directions by way of "wheeling." Also, the McKenna/Pringle PAC has wheeled money upwards to the Lynch PAC for many years.

Where has the money flowed to? In Monmouth County, the biggest recipient of campaign contributions from New Directions has been the Red Bank Democrats and their campaign accounts, each year chaired by Mayor McKenna. In fact, Mayor McKenna received \$5,000 in 2000 in his unsuccessful bid for the Democratic county chairmanship. Again, it is of no coincidence that currently there are 19 development projects proposed or under construction in Red Bank.

Another major recipient of campaign monies was Mayor Adam Schneider in Long Branch, who in addition received campaign staff help from John Lynch in his re-election campaign this past May. These staffers were formerly on the payroll of Lynch's New Directions.

Mayor Schneider and his use of eminent domain on good citizens has been fueled by these developers and professionals. Is it again a coincidence Joseph Barry of Applied Development, Charles Kushner of Westminster Properties, and Phil Konvitz - all guilty of

corruption - were doing waterfront development? Mayor Schneider also represented developer Jack Morris in the Walgreens project in West Long Branch, where a bribe was passed to a Democratic councilman.

I could certainly continue to write about how far and how deep this goes, but then it would become a book. I only wish to inspire those of you out there who are not happy with the overdevelopment of your hometowns. There is a direct link as to why it is happening, and it's not called smart growth. It is pay-to-play and corruption, and it has changed the Jersey Shore landscape.

For those facing eminent domain this holiday season, my heart goes out to all of you, for it truly is the "Lynch" who stole Christmas.

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Red Bank