

# Did speaker solicit contribution or bribe?

**B**ribe, n. Something offered or given to a person in a position of trust to influence that person's views or conduct.  
"Contribute, n. To give or supply in common with others; give to a common fund or for a common purpose."  
So which was it that Michigan House Speaker Rick Johnson was doing back in December when he wrote to lobbyists and other fat cats offering "a meal or a meeting" in return for a \$20,000 contribution to the House Republican Campaign Committee?



Phil Power

Written on Campaign Committee letterhead, the exact wording of Johnson's letter is instructive: "I would like to let you know how imperative your assistance has been and continues to be to the House Republican Campaign Committee. ... In place of having our usual large Annual Dinner, I would like to spend a meal or meeting with you to discuss the upcoming year and the role of the House Republican Campaign Committee. It is my intention that each of these engagements raise \$20,000 to maintain and increase our majority in years to come."

The exact amount requested is equally instructive. Turns out \$20,000 is the top limit on contributions to political action committees (PACs) such as the House Republican Campaign Committee. What a surprise!

The House Republican Campaign Committee led all PACs in fund raising between January and October last year, according to the Campaign Finance Network, pulling in \$2.02 million. Republicans gained five seats in the November election, now controlling the House 63-47. Again, not a surprise.

Johnson, a farmer from northern Michigan, was re-elected speaker of the House last week for a second term. He is generally regarded as hard working and fair, although blunt.

To his credit, the story was broken last week by the normally Republican-leaning *Detroit News*. Editorial comment around the state called Johnson's letter "ham-fisted," "crass" and "clumsy." Lauding insiders I talked with called the letter "politically tone-deaf" and "embarrassing," but emphasized that the practice isn't anything that hasn't been going on for years and followed by both parties.

Most said Johnson wasn't really soliciting a bribe, arguing that his letter didn't offer a specific quid pro quo in return for the \$20,000. I think that's mumbo-jumbo. Why would anybody pony up with 20 grand to have a nice intimate meal

Michigan political insiders for years have argued vociferously there is a clear distinction between the widespread practice of asking for political contributions and actually soliciting bribes.

with one of the most powerful politicians in Michigan? Just because the food is real good at Johnson's favorite restaurant?

No, a quid pro quo is a quid pro quo, whether or not it is specific. People don't pay big bucks to chin-chin with the speaker of the House just because they enjoy his company; they expect something in return for their \$20,000.

Michigan political insiders for years have argued vociferously there is a clear distinction between the widespread practice of asking for political contributions and actually soliciting bribes. Never mind how bad it looks, they say; everybody has done it for years and, anyway, how else are you going to finance the political system? I think that's just outrageous. All that kind of thinking does is condone a political system whose financial basis encourages the infestation by wealthy special interests and generates widespread cynicism about how the public's business is really conducted.

In this context, what's going on these days in Wisconsin offers an interesting alternative. There, a ton of legislators are now under indictment for taking kickbacks and shaking people down in the hallways of the state capital.

Of course, the solution is not to cobble together yet another law better to regulate political campaigns. There is no law or regulation that can suppress a system — wink-wink, nod-nod! — that is based on the exchange of money for influence, access and power. Instead, we should be forthright and publicly fund elections, the way they do it in other industrialized democracies like England, France and Scandinavia. But, of course, people over there don't understand how democracy really works!

Speaker Johnson's letter may be an outright solicitation for a bribe or merely a request for a generous campaign contribution. Either way, it's a disgusting shakedown.

Phil Power is the chairman of the board of the company that owns this newspaper. He would be pleased to get your reactions to this column either at (734) 953-2047 or at [ppower@home.com.net](mailto:ppower@home.com.net).

# Reservist spends Christmas in Cuba praying for peace

**I** miss my parish family at St. Priscilla Catholic Church in Livonia. My name is Father Raymond Bucon and was ordained 23 years ago for the Archdiocese of Detroit. This year, I spent Christmas in Cuba.

My United States Army Reserve unit was called to active duty in October 2002 as a part of Operation Enduring Freedom. We spent 40 days in immediate preparation for our mission and then flew to Guantanamo Bay and the U.S. Naval Base, our home for the next year.

I'm living and working with some of America's finest young men and women who are soldiers, sailors, marines and Air Force and Coast Guard members who count duty, honor, courage and selfless service as important values in their life. I'm extremely proud to be a chaplain in the United States Army.

The mission of my military police unit, as part of Joint Task Force-Guantanamo, is to process and guard people who see terrorism as the answer to their problems. This is a 24-hour-a-day job but there are many great diversions on this 45-square-mile base.

Here are some details to help you get a flavor of a soldier's experience in his off duty hours.

■ There are no traffic lights on the base at Guantanamo Bay. The speed limit is 25 mph.

■ You can choose from a list of two radio stations when listening to music.

■ Instead of "watch for deer" signs, there are "watch for iguana" signs.

■ The weather is usually sunny. The Caribbean Sea is warm. The beaches are full of rocks.

■ Jimmy Buffet gave a live concert for us in early December.

■ The gym, bowling alley, and McDonald's are always busy.

■ This is one store at which to shop. If they don't have an item then I guess we don't need it!

■ The majority of our soldiers are on shifts of eight to 10 hours per day. In their off hours, they sleep, snorkel in the Caribbean Sea, take college classes via computer, visit the library, and eat at one of three galley.

■ Movies are shown every evening at 7 and 9 p.m. on the big outdoor screen. Rarely are they "rained out."

■ Packages mailed here take 10 to 21 days to arrive, depending on if they travel by air or by barge. I mailed myself a box of stuff from home and received it 22 days later.

The climate is semi-desert which means it's



The Rev. Raymond Bucon celebrates Mass in Cuba while stationed as a U.S. Army Reservist.

hot and dry. There are cacti everywhere and I've transplanted a few baby cacti to the front yard of the house in which I stay. I hope someone in the distant future will enjoy them when they're grown up.

This Christmas, I find myself identifying with St. Joseph. He had to leave home, travel a far distance, worry about a pregnant wife, complete the census process, and then get everyone back safely to Nazareth. His journey lasted several years. He was faithful to God in carrying out his duties as foster-father of Jesus.

I pray all of us can be as faithful as Joseph. We're not always willing to leave the comfort of what is familiar to us. When we do, we usually encounter new challenges and problems that take time and energy to deal with. When we leave the security of established patterns in our life, it is then that we need God most. May that God who lives deeply inside of you be born anew this Christmas season.

I celebrated midnight Mass for any of the 2,000 members of our task force who wished to attend and a Christmas Day Mass was later celebrated at 10 a.m. Immediately after Mass I received a call to report to the base hospital. A sailor had a stroke and it was necessary to pray the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. I then spent a half-hour swimming in the sea before enjoying a great meal with Ken and Vickie Pace who have been stationed at GTMO for the past 30 months. It was a delicious feast and a good way to end the day.

Please pray for peace everyday. God will hear your prayers because you are his precious child. A Blessed New Year to All.

The Rev. Raymond Bucon wrote from Guantanamo Bay, Cuba on Dec. 25, 2002. His mailing address is: CH (LTC) Raymond Bucon, JTF GTMO, Chaplain Section, APO AE 09360.

# WAREHOUSE

# Sale

## JANUARY 18 & 19

**AN ADDITIONAL 20-50% OFF**  
From Our Original Selling Price from our West Bloomfield Store!

**SPECIAL PURCHASE!**  
Sherwood has purchased the showrooms of Design Institute of America and Thayer-Coggin at the Highpoint Show

**Fine Upholstered & Leather Furniture**  
plus... Beautiful Contemporary  
Tables • Curios • Wall Units • Dining Rooms

METAL FINISHES AND GLASS, WOOD OR STONE

And a Great Selection of Sofas, Love Seats, Chairs, Bedrooms, Dining Rooms, Occasional, Exotic Woods & more!

**SHERWOOD STUDIOS WAREHOUSE**  
24760 Crestview Court  
Farmington Hills

(248) 476-3766  
Orange Solid as Complete Sets  
Immediate Delivery  
All Sales Final

OPEN 10 AM - 6 PM

# Winter Wonderland Sales Event

Save 10-50% on Your Favorite Name Brands!

Going On Now

**Harvey's**

BIRMINGHAM (248) 723-5555 GROSSE POINTE (313) 881-0200