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BOB WOODWARD



The Washington Post's

Landrieu Opens Files on Schools Earmark

A \$2 million earmark for the D.C. schools from Sen. Mary Landrieu (D-La.) has become an issue in her campaign for re-election after an ethics watchdog group called for federal and congressional investigations, reports The Post's [James V. Grimaldi](#).

As reported in The Post's investigative [series](#) about the D.C. school system, Landrieu [inserted the earmark](#) in 2001 so school officials would buy a reading program from one of her major campaign contributors. School officials, who had other reading programs in mind, were initially resistant.

Landrieu and her aides declined to be interviewed for The Post's original article about the funding, but the senator said in a statement that there was no connection between the campaign money and her legislative actions. Randy Best, the founder of the company that sells the Voyager Expanded Learning literacy program, said the same in an interview.

The \$2 million earmark was guided into law by Landrieu in the fall of 2001, just after she had received more than \$30,000 in campaign contributions at a fundraiser held by Best. Best told The Post that the idea for the fundraiser came in a call from Landrieu's office after he had met with the senator about getting funding for Voyager.

Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW) has [asked the Senate Ethics Committee](#) and the U.S. Attorney in Louisiana to investigate Landrieu's earmark. On the campaign trail in Louisiana, Landrieu was asked about the matter on a [New Orleans Sunday talk show](#) and in a [TV](#)



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response that the Post's account and the CREV...
mischaracterize" the sequence of events. Landrieu's office said the documents were intended to show that the earmark had gone through proper legislative channels and had been in the works prior to the fundraiser.

Landrieu's office has now provided this timeline of events: Aides said the senator met with Best on April 5, 2001. Best asked for support for the Voyager earmark, and Landrieu's office said the senator told Best she would consider it if District officials supported it.

On April 25, then-D.C. Schools Superintendent Paul Vance wrote to Landrieu supporting Voyager's request. Vance later sent another letter reiterating support for the appropriation. Vance is not talking, but a source with knowledge of the matter, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said neither letter was initiated by Vance and it was not the school district's idea to support Voyager. Rather, the idea was passed to the schools through the office of Mayor Anthony Williams.

Greg McCarthy, a deputy chief of staff for Williams at the time, said the idea did not begin in the Mayor's office. Williams and Landrieu had developed a close relationship because she played a key role in approving District funding. So when Landrieu's office called to find out if the schools would use Voyager, McCarthy said, he then encouraged school officials to support it because reading scores were so poor.

School district officials said they were initially resistant because they had just selected a different reading program, but they felt compelled to take the money from the earmark.

One of the sources notes that language in Vance's letter made it clear he did not initiate the request for the money: "This letter is in support of the request presented to you by Voyager," Vance wrote to Landrieu. That sentence was similar to one in a letter sent to Landrieu by A.G. Davis, chief of the New Orleans schools, which also received a Voyager earmark: "I would support the request by Voyager representatives for additional funding."

Asked to comment on the timing of the letters, Landrieu's communications director, Adam Sharp, said today: "Senator Landrieu and our staff never - not once - asked local officials to produce a letter requesting funds for anything that originated from the Senator. In particular, we never asked the District to submit a request for anything they opposed. However, when a verbal request for funding was made or when our office worked closely with local officials to craft a proposal, it was not uncommon to suggest that the request be made in writing to the Chairman."

As The Post reported last month, Best, at the request of a Landrieu staffer, held a fundraiser for Landrieu in his Dallas condo on Oct. 19, 2001, and federal election records show she received contributions of about \$30,000 on or about Nov. 2. On Nov. 6, the Voyager earmark was

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included in the D.C. appropriations bill she shepherded on the Senate floor.

In her statement to The Post, Landrieu said: "It is not uncommon for Members of Congress to receive contributions from individuals who support their policy goals."

--James V. Grimaldi

By The Editors | January 22, 2008; 3:00 PM ET [D.C. Schools](#)

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Mary's dirty. Only a complete fool would believe her cock and bull story. If they all do it, they're all slime balls...

Posted by: James Sanders | January 23, 2008 9:35 PM

I sure do regret voting for Miss Landrieu in the last election. She's turned out to be just a little bit less of a criminal than William Jefferson. I won't make that same mistake in 2008.

Posted by: Reginald from Baton Rouge | January 24, 2008 8:33 PM

So, it is news that a LA Democrat is one the take, still?

Posted by: omarkhyam1951 | February 14, 2008 12:42 AM

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