

Corruption alive and well in Landrieu

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Landrieu earned her position of prominence when she accepted what CREW called a bribe from the D.C. lobbying firm O'Connor & Hannon, which Voyager Learning Company cofounder and CEO Randy Best hired to push through a \$2 million earmark.

Once the proposed expenditure was passed in the Senate, Best and his colleagues threw a fundraiser for Landrieu at his Dallas mansion.

While Landrieu claims the allegations are "wholly without merit," neither Best nor his colleagues ever donated to Landrieu until she agreed to the earmark.

Although this level of corruption is appalling, it's hardly something new to residents of Louisiana.

In the modern era of Louisiana, no politician figures more prominently than Huey P. Long in its list of corrupt politicians. When the legislature attempted to impeach then-Gov. Long in 1929, he only survived through his "Round Robin," which one-third of the members of

Louisiana's state Senate signed. Their signatures pledged they would vote not guilty no matter what evidence existed. Those senators who supported Long were given state jobs, and others were awarded cash payments.

Gov. Richard Leche was another famous corrupt Louisiana leader.

Leche validated Huey Long's prediction — his underlings would go to jail when he was not around to control them, according to the Louisiana Secretary of State's Web site. Leche and his supporters created a scheme to sell trucks to the highway department. When Leche was forced to resign, he was sentenced to 10 years in prison, only five of which were actually served.

Gov. Earl K. Long continued his older brother's traditions during his three different stints in the governor's mansion. Uncle Earl abolished the Civil Service System to increase patronage from the governor's office.

Most notably, Earl is the only governor in U.S. history to be committed to a mental institution while in office. When the head of the state hospital system, Jesse Bankston, refused to release Gov. Long, Earl had him fired and replaced with a supporter.

The most recent Louisiana governor to face legal troubles is the infamous Edwin Edwards. In 1998, federal prosecutors indicted Edwards on 26 counts of racketeering, extortion, money laundering, mail fraud and wire fraud. Edwards was convicted on 17 of the 26 counts, and his son Stephen was convicted on 18 counts as well.

Fortunately for those interested, corruption in state politics was hardly limited to the governor's office.

Since 1973, three Louisiana Commissioners of Agriculture have endured legal woes. Former Commissioner David L. Pearce received indictments on 25 counts of public payroll extortion, three counts of public bribery, one count of felony theft, one count of governmental ethics violation and one count of perjury.

Pearce's successor, Gil Dozier, was convicted on three counts of extortion and racketeering. He was sentenced to 18 years in prison.

Although he was acquitted, Bob Odom was indicted on 21 counts, which included bribery, extortion and theft.

In an article titled "Lawmaker Indicted on Corruption Charges," The Washington Post lays out the case against Rep. Jefferson. The congressman was accused of using his congressional staff and office to make himself and his family wealthier than his congressional salary would allow.

Jefferson even wrapped \$90,000 in marked FBI bills — meant for a Nigerian official — and placed them in frozen food containers in his freezer.

Jefferson's indictment is the first in which a U.S. lawmaker is charged with violating the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act. If convicted on all counts, "Cold Cash" Jefferson could face 200 years in prison.

Recently, Republican politicians have picked up this mantle of corruption and turned it into a recipe for electoral success.

U.S. Sen. David Vitter has gone so far as to include a "Government Corruption Form" on his official Web site. Vitter hopes citizens will report corruption to his office so that he and his staff can officially investigate.

Gov. Bobby Jindal was elected on a platform which promised to end corruption and increase transparency in Louisiana's politics.

While one election can hardly change the image of Louisiana overnight, the people of this state have an important decision to make this November.

The tradition of corruption and scandal can continue on with the election Landrieu to her third term in the U.S. Senate. Or, the people of Louisiana can adopt the mantra of presidential hopeful Barack Obama, and change the face of politics in this state.

Treasurer John Kennedy is starting to look good right now.

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