

THE BLADE

Editorial: Suspicious payment

THE BLADE EDITORIAL BOARD

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The Ohio AFL-CIO has some explaining to do and it should be done in Federal court under oath. Former Ohio House Speaker Larry Householder has subpoenaed AFL-CIO President Tim Burga as a witness in his racketeering trial now underway in Cincinnati.

Mr. Householder and former Ohio Republican Party Chairman Matt Borges are on trial, alleged to have received bribes from FirstEnergy Corp. as part of a conspiracy to get the utility a \$1.3 billion bailout through Ohio House Bill 6.

The Householder defense wants to put Mr. Burga on the witness stand to detail the \$1.4 million given to the Ohio AFL-CIO by the dark money political action fund created with FirstEnergy money allegedly controlled by Mr. Householder.

Mr. Burga has filed a motion seeking a ruling from the court releasing him from the obligation to testify, claiming he has no knowledge of any criminal conspiracy behind the effort to pass H.B. 6 and to protect it against a ballot issue to repeal the law.

If that's true, Mr. Burga has nothing to fear from speaking under oath, subject to cross-examination.

A full line-item accounting for the heretofore unknown \$1.4 million supplied by FirstEnergy through Mr. Householder is something the jury should hear.

Was all the money spent to produce and distribute the TV commercials and mailers meant to convince Ohio voters not to sign petitions to put the bailout on the ballot?

Toledo UAW members were the victims of a bribery conspiracy when Detroit union leaders sold them out for cash from the corporation.

Secret corporate money flowing to a union is always suspicious.

The stated use of money and actual use of money are not always one and the same as the Toledo case revealed.

The Ohio AFL-CIO supported the election of Mr. Householder as speaker, helping convince the Democrats who put him into the powerful post and favored passage of H.B. 6 before working to protect it from voters.

Then and now the AFL-CIO claimed their position was to defend union jobs connected to the nuclear power plants FirstEnergy threatened to close without the bailout.

But that reasoning flies in the face of the fact that the \$1.3 billion subsidy for FirstEnergy required a large increase in electricity costs for energy intensive manufacturers.

The 680,000 manufacturing employees in Ohio earn nearly \$67,000 a year on average and form the basis for the AFL-CIO's historic union bargaining power.

The AFL-CIO represents many service sector workers in addition to industrial employees, but none of the 650,000 unionized workers in Ohio, except a few thousand employed at Davis-Besse and Perry nuclear power plants, were served by H.B. 6.

It is illogical when a union puts the interests of a small minority of membership ahead of the vast majority.

Moreover, a union assisting anti-democratic efforts to keep citizens from overturning a corporate bailout is the world upside down.

Mr. Householder deserves to make his best defense.

It's telling that payments to the Ohio AFL-CIO are part of that defense. Justice demands that Mr. Burga be compelled to make a full explanation.

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