

After Breathing Fear into BLM

Reid Reaps 50 G's in Del Webb Funding

By Steve Miller

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When Larry Paulson went to the Las Vegas District Office of the Bureau of Land Management the first week in December and asked to see the case file on Phase 1 of the Del Webb land-swap, he was told the appraisals on the land exchange were "confidential."

So, on December 8, the former research professor and director of UNLV's Lake Mead Limnological Research Center, wrote Nevada's senior U.S. Senator, Harry Reid.

"Can they do that?" asked Paulson, who had visited the BLM office in his role as water consultant for the Nevada Seniors Coalition.

"It doesn't seem right that we can't find out what the property is worth," he wrote. "Is that the way the so called "Olympic" land swap that involves 3,800 acres and the "American Land Conservancy" deal for another 6,002 acres in the southwestern portion of the valley will be handled too?"

It is four weeks later now, and if Dr. Paulson has not yet heard from Senator Reid, it may be because Reid doesn't know quite what to say.

That's because, *Electric Nevada* has learned, Nevada's senior senator is himself a major source of in-state BLM officials' anxiety that nothing at all should interfere with the Del Webb land swap.

Reid is now, because of his ranking status on the U.S. Senate's Energy and Natural Resources Committee, the single most powerful Democrat in the Senate when it comes to either natural resource issues or power over the U.S. Department of Interior -- of which the BLM is a part.

And, for some reason, the Del Webb land swap is very much something Harry Reid wants to go through.

On at least one occasion, according to a confidential source familiar with events in the Las Vegas BLM office in late October, 1994, Reid made his wishes *extremely* clear to officials there.

According to the source, Reid, accompanied by Del Webb lawyers Virginia Turner and Don Moon, met with the-then assistant district manager, Gary Ryan, and *very* strongly emphasized he was supporting Del Webb's bid for almost 5,000 acres of Clark County land worth an estimated \$50 million.

"The Senator was very clear that Del Webb was to be a priority" for the office, said the source, adding Reid said that Del Webb was "to be put on the top of the pile and not have to go to the end of the line."

Nevada's senior senator also told assistant district manager Ryan to "take a personal interest and assist Del Webb in any way possible within the regulations."

According to *Electric Nevada's* source, both the Nevada BLM's state director and associate state director were later "fully briefed" on the meeting.

It was in 1995, after Louisiana Senator Bennett Johnson had announced his pending retirement, that Reid, now due to be the senior Democrat on the Senate's Energy and Natural Resources Committee, began receiving unusually generous campaign contributions from the Arizona land developer.

Del Webb -- according to *Electric Nevada's* search of Federal Election Commission records -- had given Nevada's senior senator \$22,000 in his first Senate re-election bid, in 1992. But it gave him nothing in 1993 or 1994.

Yet in July and then November of 1995, the "Del Webb Employee Fund for Better Government" -- a PAC -- suddenly found occasion to give Reid a total of \$40,000. And, that same year, according to F.E.C. records, individual contributions from Del Webb employees and lawyers to the Reid campaign came to a perfectly-rounded \$14,000.

Thus it was a total of at least \$54,000 that moved from Del Webb Corporation to Harry Reid in 1995 -- three years before Reid is scheduled to run for re-election. In 1996, according to the search of the F.E.C. records, Del Webb reverted to form, giving *no* campaign funds at all to Reid.