



The Regional Reporter

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Corporate influence

Tracking links between companies, lawmakers



By MIKE SORAGHAN
The Denver Post

I wish I could say that I found my local angle on the corporate con-job story by digging around in dusty files or combing through a database.

Nope. It was pushed on me for months by pestering campaign managers.

But when I dove in, I found questions of improper influence and questionable stock deals that brought the Wall Street-Washington scandals back to the Rockies, where my readers live and work.

Denver's hook into the ever-growing scandal is in telecommunications. There's Global Crossing, the fiber-optic company now in bankruptcy that made a play for Denver-based baby bell US West in 1999.

There's Qwest, an upstart long distance



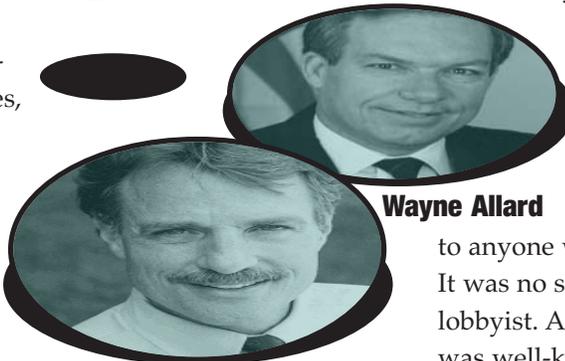
company in Denver that fought off Global and swallowed US West whole, making it the largest private employer in Colorado.

And the candidates in the Colorado U.S. Senate race – one of the top six in the country – are in this one all the way up to their cell phones.

Democrat Tom Strickland once lobbied for Global Crossing. Qwest is Wayne Allard's biggest campaign contributor.

These points had been being peddled relentlessly by the hired guns for months as the corporate scandal grew. And the basic points weren't really news to anyone who follows politics in Colorado. It was no secret that Strickland had been a lobbyist. Allard's role in boosting Qwest was well-known and not challenged at the

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Wayne Allard

Tom Strickland

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RESTIVE REGIONS

Val Ellicott and **Catalina Camia** have joined Gannett News Service. Ellicott is social issues editor while Camia edits stories on Congress and national security. Previously, Ellicott was a senior editor at Congressional Quarterly and reported for several newspapers, including the Palm Beach Post. Camia worked for Arlington, Va.-based Freedom Forum and earlier was a congressional correspondent for the Dallas Morning News.

Christopher Lee, congressional correspondent for the Dallas Morning News, is moving to the Washington Post. He'll cover the federal bureaucracy for the Post's Federal Page.

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Direct newsletter inquiries to newsletter editor Lisa Friedman at lisafriedman@angnewspapers.net or layout editor Jim Sergent at jjsergent@earthlink.net.

Find us on the Web: www.raa.org.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

By MARC HELLER ■ Watertown Daily Times

A journey to reconnect with newspaper, towns

It's hard to find a good cappuccino in Watertown, N.Y. But a little deprivation was just what I wanted.

I've found the perfect cure for Inside-the-Beltway blues, which usually hit me after Congress has been out of town for about two weeks: Get as far away from this place as I can and still be working. And Northern New York is a world away.

Every year I find a reason to reconnect with my readers, editors and fellow reporters in the north country. I take a week and go back to work on a long-term project or even a haphazard series of stories. And I always come back professionally refreshed and hungry. I recommend it for anyone, especially those who write for a single publication.

I always drive when I go back to Watertown, roughly a 425-mile haul up Interstate 81. And I always take my own car – a 1993 Mazda that I bought when I was a reporter there – partly for the weird looks I get for the DC license plates. I never saw DC tags in the three-plus years I worked there, and sometimes they're a conversation piece. This time, I took the car into the shop and the guy who worked on it said he used to live near Dupont Circle, not far from my home.

Two years ago I dug into issues regarding small-town blight and frustrated federal efforts to fix it. Last year I started a project on federal dairy policy. This year I delved into the inequities of federal aid to schools that serve military children, an issue of great local interest around Fort Drum. In all of these stories, I had the perfect excuse to talk to

lots of real people – farmers or teachers or school administrators – about everyday issues on their minds. I even got an invitation to the local Rotary lunch one day from a veterinarian friend who talked to me about selling off his collection of Corvairs, and about how sorry he was that he did not think to offer one to Ralph Nader when he visited town some years ago.

And these folks got to talk to me about Bush and Rumsfeld and all these characters who I don't really know at all but can pretend to know more about than your average Watertown resident.

It's also great to connect with local reporters. In many cases, they might have only a vague idea of what you do and who you are. And the reverse might be true. Yet these are people you can benefit from knowing on a first-name, call-at-home basis. Every federal grant I write about – in fact, almost every story I write – somehow steps on someone's local beat.

Depending on your publication, this will probably have to involve editors. In that case, you'll need to come up with something specific to justify the hotel bills and mileage and other expenses. But while I always fear that my editors will snuff out my hopes, they never do – and they never demand too much information ahead of time.

I may be going out on a limb, but I think most editors appreciate the DC correspondent's interest in connecting with the locals and are willing to invest a little in that sort of relationship. After all, a Washington bureau should be something more than a far-off wire service.

Pentagon access

Defense policy still hampers building's infrequent visitors

Lawyers begin fight to relax rules

By MARC HELLER
Watertown Times

There's good news and bad news for regional reporters concerned about losing their press credentials at the Pentagon.

First, the bad news: We don't have any substantial progress to report in changing the Defense Department's policy of automatically canceling credentials for reporters who don't show up at the Pentagon at least twice a week and write what the public affairs office decides is an adequate number of defense-related stories.

Now, the good news: We have friends working on the case. Our own lawyer, Kevin Goldberg, is working on the issue. And the National Press Club has taken up the cause. NPC President John Aubuchon wrote to Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and to the Defense Department's public affairs chief, Assistant Secretary Victoria Clarke, expressing the Club's concern that the policy hurts regional reporters and distorts the story assignment process at news organizations.

Aubuchon said he received a pro-forma acknowledgement from Clarke's office, which repeated the policy but ignored the concerns he outlined in his letter.

Defense officials started the policy in June, responding to increased security concerns. The Pentagon views the matter as a security concern, not a credentialing issue, Goldberg reported after talking with officials there. The policy applies to all non-military visitors, including the general public, officials said – people who visit from time to time do not get building passes, which allow access 24 hours a day.

We have asked the Defense Department to view reporters differently from the general public, the same as we are often treated by other government agencies in local, state and federal offices. It's not that we have any more rights than anyone else, but we argue that we have a spe-



cial role in informing the public about the government's activities, and better access to the Pentagon is part of our responsibility to our readers.

Doug Turner from the Buffalo News has also been working on this issue and argues that the security concerns are overblown. After all, he said, reporters have to go through a criminal background check in order to get a Pentagon pass. Applicants are fingerprinted and must supply names of family members, etc., for references.

Aubuchon has also argued that reporters who have hard passes at the White House and want a Pentagon pass, for instance, will have already gone through a similar background check.

While the Pentagon has long tied credentials to frequency of visits, the policy was not generally enforced once a reporter had a building pass. Now, the department is canceling passes before their expiration dates, and often without a reporter's knowledge.

If you are concerned about the status of your credentials, the contact at the Pentagon is Col. Cathy Abbott, who can be reached at (703) 697-5131.

RRA newsmaker: Education secretary

Paige addresses new teaching issues

By JESSICA WEHRMAN
Scripps Howard News Service

In an hour-long August 5 newsmaker with regional reporters, Education Secretary Rod Paige and Assistant Secretary Susan Neuman fielded questions about the new federal "Leave No Child Behind Act," Sept. 11, and the teacher's shortage.

Under the new law, paraprofessionals or teacher aides would be required to receive more training for a minimum-wage job. Education organizations have expressed a worry that the requirements will drive aides out of the field. Paige said that the law did not address compensation, and Neuman added that it was important for aides to be properly trained to work with children.

Paige also addressed ed-flex, a provision under the act that would allow some seven states to do what they wished with Title I money.

"Long-distance management doesn't work," he said.

Addressing criticisms that the new law was too restrictive, Paige said it was based on pedagogically sound principles such as class size and accountability. The ed-flex states, he said, had to follow similar principles when crafting their programs. "We're interested in results," he said.

When one reporter asked about the teacher-in-residence program, Paige said the program had been dismantled. Many employees of the Education Department, he said,



Rod Paige

were teachers.

Paige also addressed the teacher's shortage. He said even as the government aimed to beef up requirements for teacher qualifications, they aimed to look to alternative teaching routes, such as Teach for America and Troop to Teachers. Bureaucracy, he said, often kept some would-be teachers from actually becoming teachers.

When asked whether the new laws that would allow students at failing schools to transfer to other schools considered desegregation rules, he said the department's legal division was looking at that. He added that school systems are responsible for getting a court order modifying desegregation requirements to allow students to transfer to better-performing schools.

Paige also predicted that the Supreme Court decision upholding the constitutionality of private school vouchers would enable religious groups to provide tutoring and after-school programs for students at failing public schools.

On another note, he said he sent a letter to schools in hopes of developing a correspondence on school safety, particularly after Sept. 11. He said he believes the first anniversary of the terrorist attacks should give schools an opportunity to reflect on U.S. freedoms, as well as those who "continue to provide that freedom to us."

MEETING MINUTES

September 9

Present: Marc Heller, Claire Vittucci, Jessica Wehrman, Jeff Miller, Lisa Friedman, Jake Thompson, Samantha Young, Stephen Crane, Katherine Scott, Kevin Goldberg

Heller began the meeting by updating the board on the progress of a member survey. He searched RRA files for old surveys and quizzed former RRA President Jerry Zremski on whether one was sent. Zremski said one had been sent years ago in an attempt to boost membership, and said it would be good to send another one. Miller said he has not been able to draw

up a draft survey but will send it to the board before the next meeting and will talk to Zremski as well. Friedman asked that Miller include a question on what members look for in the newsletter.

Heller said newsletter designer Jim Sergent has agreed to accept a \$500 end-of-year payment for no fewer than 10 newsletter issues. He and Goldberg will work on drawing up a contract, and will have Sergent sign the contract.

Heller also said Bart Jansen has suggested printing the newsletter again. Heller, who noted that the board recently moved to

all electronic newsletters, said he might consider printing some copies for distribution at the National Press Club and the Senate Press Gallery as a recruiting tool. Friedman suggested 50 a month - half at each destination. Crane said he would consider printing them at his office.

There was no treasurer's report, but Heller said several membership dues are still outgoing. He is drafting an email as a reminder, but said some people may have sent dues but the board never received them - there was a screw up with the post office.



WEB LINK

Web site picks of the month
Click link to visit site

<http://www.corporations.org>

Consumer site with links to help research corporate activity, including the media's.

<http://www.usdoj.gov/04foia/foiacontacts.htm>

Where to find federal agency FOIA contacts on a single page. Ironically, it's a page on the Justice Department Web site.

<http://www.missingkids.com/>

For background on the rash of child abductions and disappearances. You can search the site by city and state to find out who's missing from your area. The site lists 59 missing children in Pennsylvania, 21 in South Carolina.

<http://memory.loc.gov/frd/cs/iqtoc.html>

The Library of Congress link page for information about Iraq. For more up-to-date news – and international views – try <http://www.iraqdaily.com>

- Compiled courtesy
of Jeff Miller,
Allentown Morning Call

National Writers Workshop

Resources back home, on Web

By KATHERINE HUTT SCOTT

Gannett News Service
and JAKE THOMPSON
Omaha World Herald

Several valuable tips for regional reporters emerged from the two-day National Writers Workshop on politics and government reporting held at the National Press Club Aug. 9 and 10.

A summary of the tips:

■ Hedrick Smith, creator of several PBS documentaries: Reporters are supposed to cover the people's business, not the power brokers. During congressional recesses, return with your lawmakers to their districts and attend their town hall meetings and talk to your paper's readers. Find out what ordinary people are concerned about.

"One of the most important things for a Washington reporters is to go back home," Smith said. "Always, always go back with your congressman when they go home. Don't talk to just the city editor, get out in the country. When you cover the war in Vietnam, you don't stay in Saigon."

■ Eric Nalder, San Jose Mercury News: Before writing about an issue, interview your newspaper's beat reporter that covers that issue.

■ Deborah Nelson, Los Angeles Times: Create a spreadsheet to keep track of the status of your Freedom of Information requests.

■ Andy Taylor, Congressional Quarterly: To get the administration's position on bills, look at the www.omb.gov. On the homepage, look under Legislative Information and click on Statements of Administration Policy. Good story ideas may also be lurking in the back of the

Congressional Record. In the Daily Digest section last September, for example, an amendment was mentioned to provide that the Postal Service may require air carriers to accept day-old poultry and such other live animals to be transmitted as mail, an item that turned into a great feature for a number of publications.

■ Jerry Zremski, The Buffalo News: Ask staff for your members of Congress what they are receiving in the mail.

■ Periodically search <http://thomas.loc.gov>, the Library of Congress' search engine, for legislation that your members of Congress have introduced. On the homepage, under Legislation, click on Bill Summary and Status. Under Search, click on Sponsor/Cosponsor. Select the member and hit Search.

■ Reporters also can use the Thomas site to track some correspondence between lawmakers and the White House. Often the Congressional Record has a highlighted section on correspondence, which may turn up interesting story ideas.

■ The web site <http://herndon1.sdrdc.com> is where you can download individual political campaign filings including receipts and disbursements.

■ If there is an inspector general's investigation underway on some matter, file a FOIA request for the report. You may be able to get it first.

■ Get to know lawmakers legislative staff. Ask them not what's going on but rather what are you getting in the mail. Constituents, such as big businesses back home, may be seeking support for a big-ticket item or a favored project or a tax break that isn't widely known.

LINKS

Continued from Page 1

time of the US West deal.

But of course not everyone follows politics in Colorado that closely.

We had a chance to put the whole matter in context, taking it beyond the standard "will you give back the money, Senator?" story.

We looked around a little more. We asked the candidates to dump their vacuum cleaner bags of "oppo research" on our desk. But we did our own digging through financial disclosure reports, client lists, campaign finance reports, and the Post's own archives.

We didn't find stacks of cash being exchanged in limos (yet?). What people didn't know was that Strickland had made \$25,000 in one day in Global's IPO. There's nothing criminal in that. It just shows what kind of air he breathes.

And Allard's support of Qwest wasn't just boosting a local business. Qwest's founder, billionaire Phil Anschutz, is a major Republican donor who has given more than \$100,000 to Allard's committees. And the dots hadn't been connected on Allard's curious purchase of Qwest stock.

The post's new editor, Greg Moore, on the job only a few

weeks, pressed for more detail and more context (and of course he offered up more space ... yeah, right). More strange details emerged.

The college-age son of Global founder Gary Winnick gave \$2,000 to Strickland's campaign. Not surprisingly, young Matthew, who still lives at home, did not return calls to explain his interest in a Senate race three states away.

And a careful search of our own archives produced a

nugget more meaningful now that Qwest is on the ropes. In public statements dutifully noted at the time, Allard pressed regulators to hurry up approval of a deal that affected nearly all his constituents, either through their phone service or their job.

Then we pushed the spinning surrogates out of the way and talked to the candidates themselves. We found Allard had a hard time explaining why he bought Qwest stock the day after the Qwest-US West deal was announced ("Maybe there was a lot in the news at the time. With the subconscious you kind of go that way.")

And with a quick round of calls to Beltway context providers like the Cook Report and the Center for Responsive Politics, we had a piece that took the story from Capitol committee rooms to the phones on people's kitchen counters.

Read the story at

<http://www.denverpost.com/Stories/0,1413,36%257E53%257E752425,00.html?search>

[Click here to go to site](#)

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Please fill in the following information and return it with your \$20 dues payment to:

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New applicant Renewal

Please list the publications or stations that you work for, including city and state:
