

# Legislative leadership bought, sold on the Hill

The best leadership results when people of high integrity demonstrate an impressive example of skill. Followers are eager to have such people take the lead. Unfortunately, in many instances leadership instead has been bought by favoritism, family relationships and money.



**KIM BURNINGHAM**

The Utah Legislature has had all kinds of leaders. Some of these rose to the top through excellence. Others have risen to the top by other means. When such is the case, the people pay the real price.

One former speaker of the Utah House, Greg Curtis, served in that position for two terms using strategic placement of money to assure election.

Curtis amassed a bank account in excess of \$300,000 largely contributed by lobbyists. According to Bob Bernick Jr. in the *Deseret News* (Jan. 8, 2008) Curtis "gave much of his campaign donations to fellow GOP house members...hopefully, endeavoring them to vote for him as speaker one more time."

Sen. Sheldon Killpack was a leader in the Utah Senate before his resignation was

prompted by a drunken driving charge. Many expected that he would run for a leadership position again. He gathered nearly \$200,000 in contributions, coming heavily from lobbyists. As the 2008 election approached, Killpack contributed to many fellow senators or candidates who were up for election including \$5,000 to Dan Liljenquist; \$5,000 to Steve Urquhart, \$3,000 to Mark Madsen, \$5,000 to David Hinkins, \$5,000 to Carlton Christensen, \$3,000 to Alan Christensen, \$10,000 to Carlene Walker, and \$5,000 to Scott Jenkins. Alliances cemented by money have become commonplace in the Utah Legislature.

House Speaker David Clark intends to run again for speaker. May that explain why Clark is currently giving donations of money to potential Republican members who will later vote for their leader? Or is he simply generous? (In any event, he's not spending his money; it comes from lobbyists and special interests.)

Even before the primaries were held, Clark had started peddling dollars to potential members of the House. Clark's June 15 financial report indicates that since the first of the year, he has received more than \$120,000, the majority from special interest groups. He has contributed between \$1,000 and \$3,000 to at least a dozen other men who were running for office.

The candidates were located throughout the state from Logan to Murray and from Draper to Kanab. Most of them have never served before, and for some reason Clark was eager to help them get elected.

Some recipients cover the bases. They accept donations from legislators who may end

up vying against one another in election competitions. For example, Kenneth Ivory, who is running for office in the West Jordan area, accepted a \$3,000 contribution from Clark, but also accepted a smaller contribution of \$250 from "Friends of Carl Wimmer." Wimmer has been mentioned as a potential challenger to Clark.

Verifying all the giving that has taken place from potential leaders to legislative candidates is not yet possible. Wimmer, for instance, reports zero campaign expenses or contributions. Although most legislators did file a report of campaign expenditures due on June 15, several others (usually highly visible legislators like Wimmer) report no campaign expenditures.

I doubt those reports are true. Likely they are accepting contributions or sharing money through political action committees. Such committees are not required to submit reports with the same frequency as candidates. This may be a deliberate effort to circumvent the current campaign reporting law.

Because of the Utah

legislative session's brevity, and also because the leadership assigns legislators to committee membership, legislative leaders control much of what happens in the Legislature. Where lobbyists supply money, and leaders use that money to increase influence, much power is transferred to a few leaders and the lobbyists who influence them.

Leadership candidates dismiss suggestions about "purchasing votes" by arguing that they are friends helping friends. Perhaps. However, the insidious nature of these transactions is that the recipients of leader largesse then are hooked — they dare not cross the givers of money, lest the spigot be turned off.

"Party discipline" comes at a real price to the public interest, especially where donors' private agendas come up for a floor vote. Curtis made a very public show of absenting himself from discussions about a deal involving the St. George airport which stood to earn a good deal of money for his employer. He didn't have to be in the room; everyone knew what

he wanted — and the price of opposing him.

The current system is just another conduit for lobbyist money to control the process. (Note: The statistics cited in this article are all registered on the public web sites. See disclosure@utah.gov. Go to the tab, "Public Search" and browse under "Candidates and Office Holders.")

Contributions from one legislator to another cited above are not illegal under current Utah law. The law needs changing. The safest approach would be to prohibit such exchanges of money. The Utahns for Ethical Government initiative petition does precisely that. If would-be leaders want to help their friends, they should do so from their own wallets, not somebody else's.

Leadership should be earned by capable performance, not purchased.

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## French

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calling her communist] just washed off her." A third activist, who very much loves her church, quips, "They need my perspective in Relief Society."

Utah schools of higher education have grappled with their responses to dissent. Posters announcing liberal speakers or dissident events often disappear from campus bulletin boards. During the anti-Vietnam War and anti-apartheid movements, the University of Utah sometimes tried to quell the dissent that many in the community found offensive. Gradually, university and community members became

accustomed to legal forms of dissent.

Former Brigham Young University students and faculty have documented the institutionalization of restricted dialogue, banned speakers and punishment for political or social dissent. Utah State University activists rallying for peace have sometimes confronted threats of violence, both on and off campus.

UVU administrators and student leaders received death threats when filmmaker Michael Moore visited, and Utah legislators delayed funds for a new library. Voicing anger felt by many in Utah Valley, a local student wrote, "People who support Moore should leave our state."

In Utah's "culture of obedience," the response to dissent is often automatic and harsh.

Yet other Utahns who see activism in their conservative communities respond with relief and joy.

Many activists form their own groups that support an activist identity.

One young activist suggests that lack of dialogue contributes to the political explosions we sometimes see in Utah.

She reminds us of our history, saying that many people applaud the Boston Tea Party or the suffragette and anti-slavery movements.

The same people "respond to contemporary reformers in very callous, hateful, cruel, defeatist ways. I would hope for

myself and for any person in the world that they would be as fair to the reformers who are trying to do work now as they are to the reformers who lived and died giving them the things that they enjoy."

The first 75 interviews in the Oral History of Utah Peace Activists can be read at Utah State History Archives and Utah Valley University Sutherland Archives, or viewed on line at [uvu.edu/library/archives/peace.html](http://uvu.edu/library/archives/peace.html). This project is supported by UVU, the Utah Humanities Council and Utah State History.

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