

Big money flowing in Va. politics - The Daily Progress: Letters The Editor

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“If you like laws and sausages, you should never watch either one being made” • is commonly attributed to German statesman Otto von Bismarck. Not watching what your elected officials do with your tax money is done at full risk to one’s wallet. The risk is even greater when elected officials delegate budget allocations to non-elected community members.

The minority staff report from the U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, issued July 30, has a segment featuring Albemarle County, although you might not recognize it at first.

“The Chain of Environmental Command: How a Club of Billionaires and Their Foundations Control the Environmental Movement and Obama’s EPA” • names a local advocacy group, Virginia Organizing.

Albemarle County relies upon the Agency Budget Review Team to determine budget allocations to community and agency program. This unelected, and supposedly impartial, team evaluates funding requests from a variety of community organizations and recommends dollar appropriations. It is up the Board of Supervisors to pass final judgment.

The system of oversight seemed seriously flawed in the case of VO.

Even though the ABRT budget synopsis for Fiscal Year 2014 noted that VO “projects an overall budget” • of more than \$6 million, it submitted a funding request of \$13,500 and got approval for \$4,000.

It was not the Board of Supervisors that caught this incongruity, but a county resident.

The U.S. Senate minority report did catch it, and commented: “Virginia Organizing is remarkable because the supposedly humble grassroots group receives millions in donations from major foundations... primarily the Marisla Foundation, which gave nearly \$1.3 million from 2010 to 2012 and Sea Change, which donated \$600,000 in 2010 and 2011.” •

And: “Accordingly, a group that represents itself as a small community-based organization is actually led by significant power brokers in the far-left environmental community and is heavily funded by the Billionaire’s Club.” •

The Albemarle Board of Supervisors was ready to give \$4,000 of taxpayer money (down from a requested \$13,500) to VO in the FY13/14 budget. When challenged, the BOS first reallocated it to the Community Action on Obesity program, one of VO’s supported groups, through the Virginia Department of Health and then finally to the Thomas Jefferson Health District.

Welcome to the “Billionaires Club,” • Albemarle taxpayers.

Charles Battig

Albemarle County