

Lobbyist Whittemore linked to \$400,000 in donations

By Martha Bellisle, Reno Gazette-Journal

A *Reno Gazette-Journal* investigation into Harvey Whittemore's election campaign activities in Nevada found that the embattled former lobbyist, his family and associates have given more than \$400,000 to people running for mayor, county commissions, city councils, the Legislature and other offices during the past decade.

After a recent grand jury investigation into Whittemore's campaign contributions to Congressional candidates, the *Reno Gazette-Journal* examined his contributions to local and state officials. The *RGJ* compiled a database of donations from various expense reports filed throughout the state during recent election cycles. Among the findings:

- In two cases, candidates received thousands of dollars from Whittemore companies and employees on the same day. A Washoe County Commission candidate received checks from nine contributors tied to Whittemore on a single day in 2004, and a gubernatorial candidate received four \$10,000 checks from Whittemore employees in 2005, as well as \$10,000 from Whittemore and one of his companies during that campaign.
- At least four of the employees who gave to the county commission and gubernatorial candidates were part of the recent FBI investigation into whether Whittemore used friends and employees to skirt contribution limits in Congressional races. In particular, federal officials gathered information for their investigation about contributions employees made on a single day in 2007 to Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev. Whittemore-related contributions on that day topped \$115,000.

Federal officials have been investigating whether Whittemore violated federal campaign finance laws by allegedly funneling donations through employees to Congressional candidates. Campaign giving in which the donor goes through other people to make donations above the legally allowed contribution amount is sometimes called using a conduit. The practice is a violation of federal law.

Nevada Secretary of State Ross Miller said using a conduit to get around campaign contribution limits also is a violation of Nevada law. State laws say it is illegal to make a contribution in the name of another and to exceed campaign contribution limits. In Nevada, the limit is \$5,000 per candidate per election.

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