

Alleged Conduit Contributions Lead to Indictment of Campaign Staff for Connecticut's Speaker of the House

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The United States Department of Justice and the Federal Bureau of Investigation recently conducted an investigation into campaign contributions to the federal campaign of Christopher G. Donovan, a candidate for Connecticut's 5th congressional district until his loss in the August 14, 2012, primary. Mr. Donovan currently serves as speaker of the Connecticut House of Representatives.

The allegations involve providing conduit contributions to Mr. Donovan's federal campaign. On July 24, 2012, Harry Raymond Soucy, a former labor union treasurer, pled guilty to two counts related to this matter. On July 26, 2012, seven individuals, including Speaker Donovan's former campaign manager, his former campaign finance director and a former union president, were indicted on charges related to this investigation.

Documents filed with the U.S. District Court for the District of Connecticut allege that owners of "roll your own" smoke shops (which are shops that sell loose smoking tobacco and cigarette rolling materials) were concerned about legislation pending in 2011–2012 before the Connecticut state legislature. The government claims that certain smoke shop owners provided several \$2,500 conduit contributions to the federal campaign committee of Mr. Donovan in order to hide the fact that persons interested in legislation pending before the Connecticut state legislature made such campaign contributions. In total, \$27,500 in conduit contributions are alleged to have been made. According to the government, the smoke shop owners reimbursed donors with cash.

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This investigation serves as a reminder of the potential legal liability associated with reimbursing others for making campaign contributions or making a campaign contribution in the name of another person. While this case involves federal law, nearly all states have similar restrictions applicable to contributions to state candidates.