



Congressman Rush Responds to *Chicago Sun-Times*' Inaccurate 'Conflict of Interest' Reporting

May 4, 2006

Dear Editor:

Recently, the *Chicago Sun Times* has concerned itself with my roles as the representative of the 1st Congressional District, my membership on the board of directors of the Rebirth of Englewood Community Development Corporation (ROE CDC), a \$1 million grant that ROE received from the SBC Foundation (now AT&T) six years ago, as well as legislation I am sponsoring to expand video franchising and reduce cable rates. Because of inaccurate reporting by your political writer, Lynn Sweet, the story carried by your paper has only served to confuse, rather than enlighten, the public about this matter.

The allegation raised by the *Sun-Times* was serious and was not to be taken lightly. Had Sweet done her job effectively, she would have first asked the House Ethics Committee if there was an alleged conflict before writing such a flagrant story. She didn't. I, however, did and have received a verbal determination that there is no conflict of interest in this matter. According to the Committee, because the telecommunications legislation I have jointly sponsored does not solely benefit one corporation, and because I received no direct or indirect benefit from the grant there is no conflict.

For the *Sun-Times*, or anyone else, to suggest that there was some type of quid pro quo arrangement is not only an insult, it is inaccurate. When the grant announcement was made a few years ago a press release was circulated and a press conference was held. The announcement was widely circulated by ROE, my congressional office and SBC. The *Sun Times* was the only Chicago daily that did not attend this press conference. Therefore, why would the *Sun Times* insinuate that there was ever an attempt to fly under the ethics radar?

There is something else that I would like to make clear that Sweet did not correctly note. Since received, the SBC grant has been used to provide technology resources and services to individuals living and doing business in Englewood and the south side of Chicago. The grant strictly prohibits the money being used for any capital development, such as the construction or renovation of a building. The Bobby L. Rush Center for Community Technology is not a building, but part of an overall economic development

initiative led by ROE. The technology initiative will continue when ROE CDC moves into its new headquarters. The headquarters will house all of ROE's programs, including job training and housing development. Importantly, the headquarters is being built with other funds raised by ROE, separate and distinct from the SBC grant.

The average person has no clue as to the type of scrutiny that politicians are under, particularly if you are African American and have a history of going against the grain. If my presence on a board of directors is an incentive for corporations or individuals to contribute needed dollars and resources to a underserved community like Englewood--then so be it.

Anyone who truly knows anything about me understands that I have always put my community first, whether as an activist or a congressman. I was elected to make decisions that impact the lives of many—and I will not be held hostage by partisan politics; or bullied by loud-mouth operatives who want to hijack how elected officials operate within their districts. People also know that I am accessible and accountable—I have been since I first entered public service at the age of 17. That said, there is no excuse for the inaccuracies and inanities that have appeared in the *Sun Times* concerning my role as community activist, congressman and pastor.

Sweet deliberately omitted information that would have brought your readers clarity on this issue, including several responses to questions she sought from ROE itself. She did not print even one response. The only overlap in my role as an elected official and as a pastor in my church is my consistent and documented willingness and ability to serve. I have always believed that the call to serve is the highest calling. So I will continue to serve as long as I am in a position to do so. The real conflict here is America's unwillingness to invest much needed capital in communities such as Englewood. Rather than the *Sun-Times* asking me to step down, perhaps it should ask other corporations and our nation to step up.

Sincerely,

Congressman Bobby L. Rush
1st Congressional District of Illinois

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