

A toxic donation? Lone individual contributing to Rogers' PAC has an interest in congressional bill

By John Fleming
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Money is at the heart of most political campaigns. Sometimes, though, it's not how much, but its source, that can raise questions.

Such could be the case with a donation to American Security PAC, a so-called leadership political action committee, set up by Rep. Mike Rogers, R-Saks.

Leadership PACs are used mostly by incumbents (more than 200 representatives in the U.S. House have such political action committees) to fund other campaigns and causes. Such PACs allow members of Congress to spread money and influence outside their districts and build alliances with fellow members.

Rogers set up American Security PAC last year. Since then, according to the Federal Elections Commission, it has helped fund the congressional races of fellow Republicans Tim Murphy of Pennsylvania, Marilyn Musgrave of Colorado and Jon Porter of Nevada. There is also a contribution to the National Republican Congressional Committee.

Contributors to Rogers' PAC include Alabama Power's PAC, Washington Group International (a K Street lobbying firm) and the PAC of the insurance company AFLAC.

The only individual contribution to Rogers' American Security PAC was for \$1,500 from Oxford resident Charles Wigley, the owner of Tull Chemical Company.

Tull is the only U.S. manufacturer of the pesticide sodium fluoroacetate, commonly known as Compound 1080. It is almost exclusively used in a few states in the American West where ranchers use it to control predators, in New Zealand where the government uses it to try to eradicate a non-native population of opossums and, according to Wigley, Australia and Israel.

Compound 1080 used to have many manufacturers, including Monsanto, but was banned in the early 1970s. The EPA reapproved it during the Reagan administration for limited use. Since it was developed decades ago, the National Institutes of Health has blamed the poison for 16 deaths, and the EPA lists Compound 1080 as a Category 1 Toxin. The number of reports of people growing ill from coming into contact with it is expanding.

Brooks Fahy, executive director of the Oregon-based Predator Defense, who is active in trying to ban the poison, said, "not only is Compound 1080 one of the most concentrated, deadly poisons on earth with no known antidote, it is also horrifically cruel, causing a long, agonizing death."

Compound 1080 has another controversy attached to it: In 2003, when American troops were storming through Iraq, looking for, and worrying about, chemical weapons, they stumbled upon someone who offered to show them some.

According to the final report compiled by the Iraqi Survey Group and released in 2005, investigators who were sent to Iraq to try to find evidence of weapons of mass destruction, spent a good deal of time looking into the workings of an entity within the Iraqi Intelligence Service (IIS) called the M16.

Though in the end the survey group found little, there were a few exceptions, including a bottle of Compound 1080, with a label clearly showing its address: Oxford, Alabama.

Beside the photograph was this caption: "In early May 2003, a sensitive source gave coalition forces a box of chemicals he claimed the IIS M16 preparation division was researching. The chemicals were meant for assassinations or to assist in kidnapping."

Charles Wigley said the only record he has of a shipment of Compound 1080 to Iraq was to the Iraq Grain Board, in 1976.

"We haven't made that label in at least 20 years," he said, before adding that no one from the federal government has ever asked him about how a bottle of 1080 showed up in Iraq.

When asked about Wigley's contribution to American Security PAC, Rogers' campaign office replied in an e-mail that read in part, "Clearly, this local business owner simply wanted to support the American Security PAC's goals, which are to help support Congressional candidates who believe in a strong national defense."

But another issue looms for Tull Chemical beyond national defense. A bill is pending in Congress that would ban the production and distribution of Compound 1080.

This is not, however, why he made the donation, Wigley said. He supports Rogers. His donation, Wigley said, came because he read that one of the reasons Rogers created his PAC was to support candidates "who shared his views."

"I know Mike Rogers," said Wigley, "but I have never spoken to him about the pending bill or about Compound 1080."

He did, however, explain the bill to a Rogers staffer, who he could not identify.

Addressing the pending bill, the e-mail from Rogers' campaign read, "Like thousands of other bills that have not been debated, Congressman Rogers has not reviewed or taken a position on this legislation, or acted in any official capacity to address the issue."

The bill, sponsored by Rep. Peter DeFazio, D-Ore., is in an Agricultural subcommittee.

At least two of the representatives American Security PAC has supported are in predominantly rural districts with constituents who might have an interest in Compound 1080, and one, Marilyn Musgrave, sits on the House Agriculture Committee.

For his part, Wigley said he didn't make the contribution in the hopes that it would help defeat the bill. He also says he doesn't even know who Marilyn Musgrave is.

Oxford resident Ken Rollins has been a critic of Tull Chemical since the early 1990s. He has presented petitions to the Oxford City Council and helped people in the neighborhood around the plant on Burton Street, just west of South Quintard in Oxford, prepare paperwork for EPA review.

When told that Rep. Rogers' PAC was the recipient of a donation from Tull Chemical, Rollins said, "I am shocked to know that anyone would accept money from a company that continues to make a product that is so dangerous."

Rollins is intimately familiar with the efforts to ban Compound 1080, so he closed the conversation with saying, "I would be very interested to know where my congressman, Mike Rogers, stands on the current bill to ban 1080."

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