

# Fallout from lobbyist's plea a jolt to GOP

By TOM RAUM  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

## WASHINGTON

The plea deal worked out by Jack Abramoff could send seismic waves across the political landscape in this congressional election year. The Republicans, who control Congress and the White House, are likely to take the biggest hits.

The embattled lobbyist pleaded guilty Tuesday to federal charges of conspiracy, tax evasion and mail fraud, agreeing to cooperate in an influence-peddling investigation that threatens powerful members of Congress.



ABRAMOFF

## ANALYSIS

The GOP has more seats to lose and has closer ties with the former lobbyist. But some Democrats with links to Abramoff and his associates are also expected to be snagged in the influence-peddling net.

While the full dimensions of the corruption probe are not yet clear, some political consultants and analysts are already comparing its damage potential to the 1992 House banking scandal that led to the retirement or ouster of 77 lawmakers.

"You don't have to be a political genius to sniff the smell of blood in the water," said GOP consultant Rich Galen.

Galen said even lawmakers in seemingly safe districts, and those who don't have

a reputation for being fast and loose with the rules, could be vulnerable if voters rise up in reproach and everybody drops five or six points in this year's midterm contests.

The guilty plea by Abramoff, a former \$100,000-plus fundraiser for President Bush with close ties to former House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, cleared the way for his cooperation with federal prosecutors in bringing charges against former business and political associates.

The investigation is believed to involve up to 20 members of Congress and aides and possibly several administration officials.

The timing couldn't be worse, politically, especially for Republicans. Lawmakers who may be indicted could find themselves coming to trial this summer, just ahead of the midterm elections. Around

the same time, Lewis "Scooter" Libby, former chief of staff to Vice President Dick Cheney, is expected to stand trial in the CIA leak case.

DeLay, who had to step down as majority leader in September after a grand jury in Texas indicted him in a campaign finance investigation, is awaiting a trial date.

With so many trials and prosecutions in the works, speculation is swirling over whom Abramoff might bring down and on the possible fallout for others.

Most Americans are convinced that corruption reaching into all levels of government is a deeply rooted problem. According to an AP-Ipsos poll last month, 88 percent say the problem is a serious one, with 51 percent calling it very serious.

For months, federal prosecutors have focused on whether Abramoff defrauded his Indian tribal clients of millions of dol-

lars and used improper influence on members of Congress. Tribes represented by the lobbyist contributed millions of dollars in casino income to congressional campaigns.

Abramoff also took members of Congress on lavish overseas trips and provided sports tickets, golf fees, frequent meals, entertainment and jobs for lawmakers' relatives and aides.

Some lawmakers have returned contributions. Others no doubt are nervously scouring their memories and appointment books.

For years, many lawmakers have shrugged off lobbyists' gifts as campaign contributions, harmless wining, dining and socializing.

"Now you've got someone admitting exactly what the motivation was and explaining all the avenues they used," said Kent Cooper, a former Federal Election Commission official.

## Phase-in on toll hike for trucks proposed

Move by Daniels could help road plan

By MIKE SMITH  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

## INDIANAPOLIS

Indiana House leaders outlined priorities and concerns Tuesday on the eve of the legislative session, while Gov. Mitch Daniels said he would phase in higher fees for trucks on the Indiana Toll Road instead of implementing them all at once in the spring.

That decision pleased the Indiana Motor Trucking Association, the state's largest trucking lobbying group, and could help the Republican governor win support for parts of a highway proposal that need legislative approval.

Meanwhile, House Speaker Brian Bosma said he generally had decided how the prayer opening the session today would be handled in light of a federal court order banning overtly Christian prayer in the chamber. He provided no details, saying he still wanted to consult with other leaders, but said he would not defy the order.

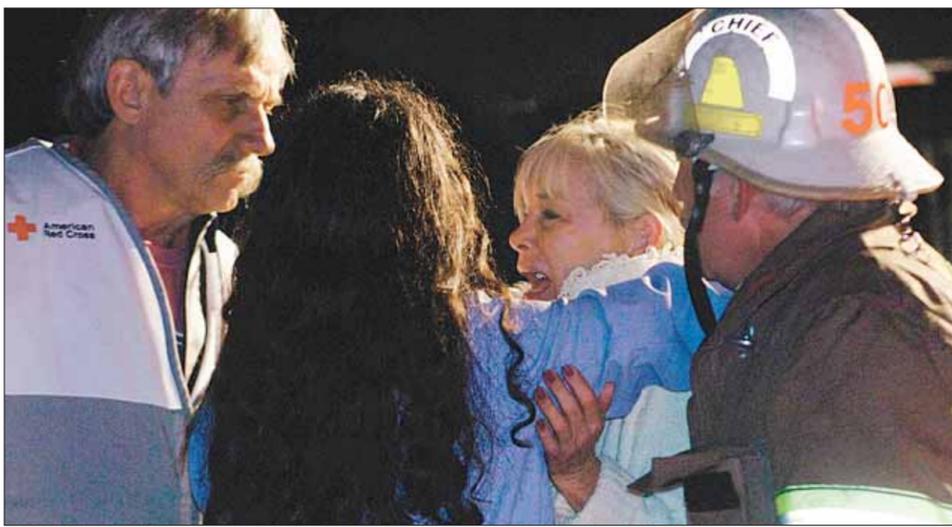
It bars specific references to Christianity or other religions, saying such prayers amount to state endorsement of a religion. Bosma claims the ruling tramples on free speech and said Tuesday that clergy members now say they would not give opening prayers if asked.

The House planned to convene the session at 1:30 p.m., and Bosma said the way the invocation was handled would then be known. The Senate does not plan to meet until Monday.

Although this session is to end by March 14, instead of in late April in long-session years, Daniels and Republicans have promised to pursue an ambitious agenda.

Bosma said House Republicans would wait until next week to detail specifics of their agenda but said initiatives to create jobs, especially for smaller businesses, and providing at least temporary tax relief to homeowners this year would be top priorities.

# One body found as hopes dim for miners



An unidentified family member, second from right, is comforted upon her arrival Tuesday in Tallmansville, W. Va. Rescuers recovered one body as the prospects of finding anyone alive began to look bleak after deadly levels of carbon monoxide were detected.

## 'We are clearly in the situation where we need a miracle'

By VICKI SMITH  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

### TALLMANVILLE, W.Va.

Rescue crews found one body late Tuesday in a West Virginia mine where 13 miners were trapped after an explosion, but they held out hope that the others were still alive.

The unidentified body was found about 700 feet from a mine car, and it appeared the employee was working on a beltline, which brings coal out of the mine, said Ben Hatfield, chief executive officer for the mine's owner, International Coal Group Inc.

Red Cross volunteer Tamila Swiger, who was with miners' families inside a church, said family members were passing out and crying and in bad shape after hearing about the body from Gov. Joe Manchin.

There was no immediate word about the fate of the other 12 miners, who had been trapped 260 feet below the surface of the Sago Mine, about 100 miles northeast of Charleston, after an explosion Monday.

Rescuers located the body about 11,250 feet from the mine's entrance. Officials had thought the miners were about 12,000 feet inside the mine.

Hatfield said it appeared that the other miners were able to get out of the mine car under their own power.

"But we do not know from there, at this point, where they have gone," he said. "We are still operating in rescue mode and are looking for survivors."

Rescuers cannot go any farther in the mine without improved ventilation systems, which the company was installing, he said.

Company officials have refused to speculate on the cause of the blast, but the governor's office said it might

have been caused by lightning.

Hatfield said rescue crews did not find a cave-in or a roof collapse in the mine. He said the explosion may have occurred in an abandoned section of the mine that was sealed off in December.

The body was found near a mine car that was undamaged. Families hoped the undamaged car meant the other miners may have been able to escape unharmed.

Earlier Tuesday, the prospects of finding any of the miners alive appeared bleak after holes drilled into the ground yielded deadly levels of carbon monoxide and no signs of life.

By early evening, Hatfield said, rescuers were three to five hours from reaching the spot where the miners were thought to be.

"We are clearly in the situation where we need a miracle," he said. "But miracles happen."

## Homeland Security to redirect more anti-terror funds to cities at risk

By DEVLIN BARRETT  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

### WASHINGTON

More of a \$765 million counter-terror program will go to cities at greater risk, the Homeland Security Department said Tuesday, cheering those who say too much has been sent to communities unlikely to face major threats.

The announcement created potential winners and losers among

dozens of metropolitan areas competing for funds from the urban area security initiative, which is being cut from the \$855 million Congress provided last year.

"I think that's exactly what we have been screaming for all along," said New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg. New York received \$207 million from the program last year, by far the most any community received.

Homeland Security officials

said they will not announce how much each qualifying metropolitan area will receive until June, after a competition that will include agency scrutiny of their plans for using the money. That means there could be months of lobbying by city officials and their representatives in Congress before any final decisions are made.

The funds can also be used to prepare communities to respond to a natural disaster or a health

crisis, such as a flu pandemic.

The agency said 35 metropolitan areas have to apply for funding and show they have a good use for the money. Those cities include Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco, New Orleans, Denver and Miami and Indianapolis.

The decision to restructure payments was bad news for 11 cities that had previously been awarded such money. They will be given "sustainment" funding to finish

work already started, but are in danger of being dropped from the program entirely in years to come.

Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff said the changes show the agency is responding to past complaints about possible waste and misallocation of funds.

"We are taking a giant step forward in implementing this risk-based strategy," Chertoff told reporters.

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