

Their \$140G bought them nothing?

A letter to Jersey City Mayor Jerramiah Healy, dated March 17, 2005, begins, "Dear Mayor Healy: I am pleased to enclose the following contributions to the Healy Team," and goes on to list by name, check number and amount contributions totaling \$140,000 for the mayor's campaign war chest.

The letter was written by Jersey City real estate developer Joseph Panepinto and faxed to the Rev. Francis Schiller, developer and the chief legal eagle for Jersey City real estate interests, to be presented to his honor at a breakfast meeting.

Mayor Healy has declared on several occasions that campaign contributions have no bearing on any decisions he makes concerning Jersey City.

In fact, when I called the Mayor's Office for a comment on the list of big-time develop-

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ers mentioned in this letter, a spokesman for Healy relayed this message: "No decision regarding the city of Jersey City, while I was a councilman-at-large or mayor, has been influenced in the slightest by campaign contributions or the lack of them. My only criteria has been what's good for the people of Jersey City."

It would be nice to take the mayor at his word, but considering all the talk coming out of Washington about how special interest money is influencing political decisions, the mayor's comments would appear to

make Jersey City an anomaly, the only place in the nation where campaign money doesn't matter.

Given the sordid political history of Jersey City and Hudson County, that strains credulity.

The memo marks Panepinto as the fund-raiser for 12 \$5,000 checks and others that range in amount from \$600 to \$2,500.

Schiller is credited as the fund-raiser for three \$10,000 checks, including one from his own law firm's political action committee, and others for other amounts. Developer Joe Barry is named as the fund-raiser for three contributions totaling \$20,000.

The memo goes on to detail contributions raised by Panepinto and directly submitted to the Mayor's Office, including \$5,000 each from developer Dean Geibel and attorney Rudy Garcia.

The memo also claims

another \$15,000 raised by Panepinto was given directly to former Jersey City Housing, Economic Development and Commerce Director Jack Beirne. (The director of HEDC directly handling campaign money? It's one of those things that make you go "hmmm.")

A notation on the memo says the checks handed over to Beirne were payable to the Jersey City Democratic Party.

Lastly, the memo assures the mayor that additional sums of \$5,000 from former U.S. Congressman Frank J. Guarini and attorney Peter G. Sheridan "will be forthcoming."

I'm sure the \$140,000 tally of campaign money made the mayor's bacon and eggs during breakfast with Schiller taste better.

The mayor says this money flowing into his campaign coffers from Jersey City's most prominent lawyers and developers buys them no influence in his decisions involving tax exemptions. Well, we report, you decide.