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# Pelosi calls for probe of 2 state Republicans / Democratic leader wants reform after lobbyist scandal

January 13, 2006 | By Edward Epstein, Chronicle Washington Bureau

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(01-13) 04:00 PST Washington — **2006-01-13 04:00:00 PST Washington** -- House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi of San Francisco called Thursday for the dormant House Ethics Committee to open investigations of several members tied to lobbyist Jack Abramoff, including two Northern California Republicans, Rep. Richard Pombo of Tracy and Rep. John Doolittle of Rocklin (Placer County).

In a letter to House Speaker Dennis Hastert, R-Ill., Pelosi also called for Congress to pass sweeping lobbying reform legislation after it returns late this month. She also called for the House to change the new Medicare prescription drug benefit, and to repeal oil and gas industry tax breaks and liability protection for makers of avian flu virus, legislation Democrats cite as examples of laws Republicans passed to cater to industries that are major GOP contributors.

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Republicans reacted angrily to Pelosi's comments, saying they were part of a partisan attack that fails to acknowledge that Democrats, too, have been the beneficiaries of Abramoff's largesse.

The letter to Hastert represented an intensification of Pelosi's effort as dominated by what she calls a "culture of corruption." At a Capitol news conference, she used that phrase 14 times, showing that Democrats plan to use the spreading Abramoff scandal as an issue to try to win back a House majority in the November midterm elections.

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Abramoff, a powerhouse Washington lobbyist, has pleaded guilty to corruption charges and he is cooperating with federal prosecutors. His plea helped persuade one of his top House allies, Majority Leader Rep. Tom DeLay, R-Texas, to quit his leadership post.

Among the other members linked to Abramoff are Doolittle, whose wife got a job at a firm associated with the lobbyist, and Pombo, the Resources Committee chairman whose alleged ties to Abramoff included pushing for federal recognition for a Massachusetts Indian tribe that was a client of the lobbyist. Since the scandal erupted, Pombo has donated to charity \$7,000 in Abramoff campaign contributions.

Pelosi also suggested that the Ethics Committee look into DeLay and Rep. Bob Ney, R-Ohio, a member who was referred to obliquely in Abramoff's guilty plea.

"Media stories have contained allegations that each of these members committed egregious violations of House rules," Pelosi said in her letter.

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Pelosi, a former Ethics Committee member, said she had no special knowledge of the allegations involving Pombo and Doolittle.

"I only know what I have read in the paper. And obviously the Ethics Committee is not acting, but that's what an ethics committee is about, to look at the actions that are there and see to investigation, if further adjudication is required," she said.

The House ethics panel ground to a standstill in 2005 when Republicans ousted DeLay, the longtime chairman, after the committee admonished him three times and tried to impose new rules.

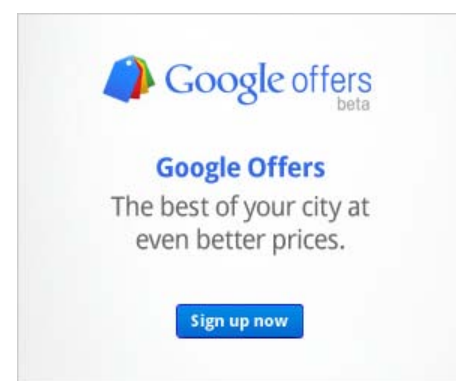
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Pombo called Pelosi's statement "baseless, politically motivated character assassination tactics."

"I have never engaged in any illegal or unethical conduct in my 13-plus years of service in Congress. Any assertion to the contrary is entirely false," he said.

Laura Blackann, Doolittle's spokeswoman, also reacted angrily, saying, "This is nothing more than a San Francisco liberal pointing a partisan finger across the aisle in a lame attempt to score political points in the press."

Pelosi's sweeping call for Ethics Committee investigations did not include a look at the actions of Rep. William Jefferson, D-La. A Jefferson aide has pleaded guilty to bribing a public official and said Jefferson demanded bribes. The Democratic congressman has not been charged.

Hastert, who is working on a package of lobbying reforms, responded to Pelosi with a swipe of his own.

Hastert's spokesman Ron Bonjean told the Associated Press it was "hypocritical for leader Pelosi to throw mud" when the Federal Elections Commission fined a fundraising committee run by her \$21,000 last year for improperly accepting donations over federal limits.

"It's hard to take Ms. Pelosi seriously when her own rap sheet is longer than her missive for reform," Blackann said

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