

By Mike Hasten / *Gannett Capital Bureau*

BATON ROUGE - It has been said that money talks. Often it wines, dines, dances and sets state policy, too.

Some donors of sizable funds to Gov.-elect Kathleen Blanco's campaign have been invited to cocktail parties and the Inauguration Ball in New Orleans. Some were appointed to state transition panels that selected the heads of state offices, and some are in line to be appointed to state boards and commissions.

Blanco is backing others for positions of responsibility in the Legislature.

State election law allows each individual or organization to contribute up to \$5,000 per election. Since Blanco was in a primary and general election, she received \$10,000 from some donors.

Campaign finance reports show several Democratic legislators contributed \$5,000 to Blanco's campaign. Included are Rep. Jerry Luke LeBlanc of Lafayette, who advised and traveled with Blanco and is now her commissioner of administration; Sen. Don Hines of Bunkie, backed by Blanco as Senate president; Rep. Joe Salter of Florien, backed as Speaker of the House; Sen. Joe McPherson of Woodworth, expected to chair the Senate Health and Welfare Committee; and Rep. Francis Thompson of Delhi. The House has not yet named committee chairmen.

A check of appointments to the governor's transition advisory panels found some donors also received appointments to help shape policy and choose state government department heads.

For example, Acadian Ambulance and Air Med Services President Richard Zuschlag contributed the maximum through his firm, and together with his wife, personally contributed \$7,000, campaign finance reports show.

Zuschlag was named vice-chairman of Blanco's Department of Health and Hospitals transition team, chaired by Shreveport physician John George, who also contributed to Blanco's campaign.

Other major contributors on advisory panels include Lafayette lawyers Clyde Simien, Ricky Miniex, Paul Arsement, John D. Bernhardt and William M. Hudson. Also from Lafayette are Realtor Paul Segura, Environmental Concerned Oilfield Services CEO Jim McGehee and Merlin Oil and Gas and Empire Energy Corp. President Mark Miller.

Other major contributors on transition panels include: Bayou Companies managing partner Jerry Shea of New Iberia; Shreveport lawyer William Comegys III, Harry Avant of Smith Operating and Management Co. of Shreveport, and governmental consultant Michael Thompson of Delhi.

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