










Witte: Conflict of interests run amuck with Rastetter

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There seems to be an emerging top donor in Iowa Republican politics, and he also happens to be the president pro temp of the Board of Regents. This is a very powerful position in a state like Iowa, because he is charged, in part with the rest of the Board, with overseeing funding and other critical actions taken by the three public universities of Iowa. If you have not guessed as to whom I am talking about, it is none other than Bruce Rastetter.

Rastetter was appointed as a member of the Board of Regents by Gov. Branstad earlier this year and bumped up to president pro temp of the Regents in July. He was appointed mere months after Branstad was elected governor in 2010.

What many people may not know, however, is that Rastetter was heavily involved in donating to Branstad's gubernatorial campaign. Records indicate that over \$160,000 was made to the campaign of Terry Branstad on behalf of Mr. Rastetter, making him Branstad's biggest single contributor. Moreover, every candidate that Rastetter donated to in Iowa statehouse races in 2010 won their campaign. So either Rastetter knows how to pick winning candidates, or they were bankrolled by him, and the airwaves were saturated with campaign ads bought by Rastetter.

Also, when Bruce's brother, Brent Rastetter, who owns a company that constructs hog confinements, donated \$31,000 to Branstad's 2010 campaign, Branstad rewarded him with a position on the Iowa Environmental Protection Commission.

The activity just described is known as patronage, which is the act of donors receiving government jobs from the candidates they supported during a campaign. This activity is

not always unethical, as when an elected official appoints supporters to implement a policy, but other times it can be unethical when the newly appointed officials are either incompetent or have an ulterior motive.

So as the new high-ranking member of the Board of Regents, one must believe that this position requires a very substantial career in education administration, right? Well, not in this case. Reading the biography that is given of Rastetter on the very website of the Board of Regents, not one word is mentioned that implicates any work in education administration. Ever. You mainly see the words "CEO", "co-founder", and "donor"; nowhere does it say how qualified he is to oversee the state's public universities. In fact, the only activity Rastetter has had with the public universities before becoming a regent was vast donations to the University of Iowa football program and Iowa State's Agriculture Entrepreneurial Initiative. Hardly the stuff of administrative experience.

Does anyone else see a problem with this? Not only, in this short biography, does it say nothing about administration, the only sphere in which Rastetter has devoted his life is in business, and more specifically, agribusiness. Whether it be hog production, ethanol or other forms of agricultural infrastructure, Rastetter has been in agribusiness his entire life, the very same agribusiness that Iowa State specializes in satisfying.

Hawkeye Energy Holdings Co., of which Rastetter is a co-founder, at one point owned four very large ethanol plants in Iowa, and quickly became one of the largest producers of ethanol in the country. However, when the industry went through hard times several years ago, the plants filed for bankruptcy. After the filings, when they finally reemerged, a subsidiary company of Koch Industries purchased the ethanol plants. Koch Industries, you may know, is owned by the famous Charles and David Koch, who have donated millions toward right-wing, business-friendly causes, including the Cato Institute, Americans for Prosperity and many other think tanks.

So to sum up, here we have a man that is appointed as a member of the Board of Regents who has never worked a day in education in his life. He is appointed to this position after donating vast sums of money to the gubernatorial campaign of Terry Branstad. All his life, he has worked in agribusiness and has accumulated an immense amount of wealth, and it so happens that one of the three public universities in Iowa heavily specializes in sustaining agribusiness.

There is a word that describes the activity in which someone uses his or her influence to get involved in governance to manipulate the system in order for personal gain: corrupt. And, in such a dire time for higher education in the state of Iowa, we need Regents who are interested in the betterment of all.