

THE CONGRESSMAN FROM NSA WANTS CONTRACTOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO REMAIN SECRET

To be fair, Steny Hoyer can't lay sole claim to be the Congressman representing the National Security Agency—the NSA actually gets three Congressmen: Steny, John Sarbanes, and Dutch Ruppersberger.

But I think it fair to note that Steny has, at key times, been the beneficiary of big political contributions from corporations with NSA sensitivities—like AT&T and Mantech. Just as notably, he's gotten even bigger money from the banksters (particularly JP Morgan Chase, which has its own chunk of federal business) and other finance companies that ruined our economy.

In other words, Steny's opposition to contractor transparency might be considered self-interest.

Minority Whip Steny Hoyer (D-Md.) said government contracts should be awarded based solely on the reputation of the company and the substance of its bid. The issue of political contributions, he said, has no place in the process.

"The issue of contracting ought to be on the merits of the contractor's application and bid and capabilities," Hoyer told reporters at the Capitol. "There are some serious questions as to what implications there are if somehow we consider political contributions in the context of awarding contracts."

Now, perhaps it's the reporting, but consider the logic of this funny claim: "There are some serious questions as to what implications there

are if somehow we consider political contributions in the context of awarding contracts." Who is the "we" here? Contracting officers? If they were to consider donations to *affirmatively* award contracts, they'd be committing Hatch Act violations and risk losing their job. But seeing big donations from, say, Mitchell Wade to a powerful Congressman like Duke Cunningham might raise concerns from contracting officers about undue influence (though admittedly, Cunningham's staffers made it pretty clear to contracting officers what they wanted).

Is the "we" Congressmen themselves? Is Steny really suggesting that Congressmen are not aware of who their donors are, are not intimately familiar with how much they're raking in from contractors?

Which leaves the possibility that by "we" Steny means "us," citizens, journalists, and good government advocates. Is Steny suggesting that "we" shouldn't consider the (ahem) possibility that members of Congress push contracts for their campaign donors? That we shouldn't consider the implications of such possibilities?

Then again, the guy who steered warrantless wiretapping immunity through Congress might simply want to avoid making it easier for us to understand not just how contracts tie to political donations, but legislation itself.