

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Congressman Bill Shuster Accused of Fixing 'Six Pack Law' For VI To Receive Campaign Cash

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WASHINGTON – The six-pack law is called “an obscure regulation” with no connection to Bill Shuster’s home constituency in Pennsylvania.

Yet Shuster, the powerful chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, was willing to work with former Gov. John de Jongh to get a law passed that doubled the number of passengers allowed aboard uninspected commercial charter yachts from six to 12.

The question is why? According to [Politico](#), the answer is simple: money. The online news source said the same month that Shuster championed the six-pack law for the

territory, he received \$33,000 in campaign contributions from people he mostly had never met before.

“He was instrumental in making that deal happen,” said Pash Daswani to Politico, president of Lucky Jewelers and head of the India Association of the Virgin Islands.

Politico said Daswani attended a meet-and-greet with Shuster and de Jongh in 2013 at which the need to change the six-pack regulation was discussed. Just days after the bill passed the House, Daswani gave Shuster \$500.

It’s not unusual for policymakers to raise money from individuals and corporations who have “vested interests before Congress,” Politico wrote, but relaxing a rule that affected only the Virgin Islands and the way contributors from the territory connected the two was.

“(Shuster) came down to the Virgin Islands and gave a talk,” about the boat regulation, said Steve Lammens, President of [Custom Builders](#) on St. Thomas, who cut a \$1,000 check to the congressman, his first contribution to a federal candidate. “That was it. A one-time deal.”

Lammens said he “was given information” that Shuster’s panel had authority over the six-pack rule.

Noah Bookbinder, president of the liberal Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, said the case appears to be “a naked example of policy being made because money is there.”

“It does seem like a fairly stark example of an official being influenced by something other than what is in his constituents’ interest and what’s in the public interest,” said Bookbinder, whose group was the first to bring their concerns to Politico.

Shuster’s spokesman, Casey Contres, said the Pennsylvania lawmaker’s fundraising is not linked to his work on legislation.

“To assert otherwise is simply not the truth,” Contres said. “He raised money for his leadership PAC in the (Virgin Islands) which helps support and maintain our Republican majority. He is always grateful to those supporters from Pennsylvania’s 9th congressional district and across the country who believe in his vision for ensuring that the federal government maintains its role in the transportation and infrastructure needs of the country.”

Contres added that while Shuster often travels to the Virgin Islands with his family for a one-week vacation, he does not have an interest in the maritime industry there and doesn’t personally benefit from the legislation.

The Passenger Vehicle Safety Act passed in 1993 and limited to six the number of paying passengers that can be carried aboard uninspected vessels less than 100 tons.

When the law first went into effect, the territory lost many charter yachts and millions of dollars in revenue as the maritime industry moved to the British Virgin Islands and its less stringent inspection standards.

For years the territory's leaders had pushed for an exemption to the six passenger restriction, known as the six-pack law, for the Virgin Islands to help resuscitate the local marine industry here.

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