



NY Times Targets Rep. Issa; Issa Fires Back

The implications in the New York Times? article about Rep. Darrell Issa (R-Calif.) were clear even in the title: "A Businessman in Congress Helps His District and Himself"? Issa was using his position as chairman of the House Oversight and Government Reform committee to enrich himself.

In the article, Eric Lichtblau implied that even the close proximity of his congressional office and his business office on the third floor of a gleaming office building overlooking a golf course in San Diego, signaled a highly suspect intermeshing of corporate and political interests. Lichtblau said that as Issa's personal fortune has grown during his years in Congress (he was first elected [in 2001](#)), so too has the overlap between his private and business lives, with at least some of the congressmans' government actions helping to make a rich man even richer and raising the potential for conflicts.



Lichtblau reported that Issa purchased a medical plaza for \$10 million a few years ago, arranged for earmarks to improve the road in front of it, making it now worth \$16 million. The writer noted that Issa purchased a mutual fund for \$19,000 and sold it later for \$357,000, a return of nearly 1,900 percent in just seven months. Lichtblau suggested that Issa's interests in an electronic auto parts company as a major supplier of alarms to Toyota made him go easy on the automaker during the investigation into that automakers' acceleration problems. All of which, according to Lichtblau, puts Issa into conflict with congressional guidelines that such outside activities may force him to detract from a member's full time and attention to his official duties.

[Within hours](#) of the article hitting the newsstands on Monday, August 15th, Issa spokeswoman Becca Watkins challenged the accuracy of it, starting with the very first paragraph:

Beginning with the opening line, the *New York Times* piece is riddled with factual errors and careless assertions that has resulted in a story predicated on innuendo and not fact.

It's disappointing that the so-called paper of record has decided to publish a story that is nothing more than a compilation of left-wing blog posts that are easily found by a simple Google search. It's the same old playbook: Every time Darrell Issa starts gaining ground, the left-wing smear machine goes on the attack. If anything, this story validates the work that the Chairman of the Oversight and Government Reform Committee is pursuing.

By 11:15 AM of that same day the *Times* issued its first correction, noting that the article misstated the worth of the companies involved in [the] splitting up of a holding company. The split entailed separate



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multimillion-dollar companies, not multibillion-dollar ones. And that's when Issas staff went into overdrive, listing an additional 12 major faults and errors of fact in the article and demanding a front-page retraction by the *Times*.

To begin with, Issas office building isn't gleaming but ordinary, and doesn't have a view of the golf course after all. In fact the Shadowridge Country Club is a mile and a half away. And Issa didn't buy the building for \$10 million after all he paid \$16 million for it, just about its current assessed value. In fact, he bought it after work on the thoroughfare had started, which meant that he might even have overpaid for it.

And the mutual fund in which he allegedly invested \$19,000? The original investment was \$500,000, and when he sold it, he took a loss of \$125,000. As far as his company, DEI Holdings, Issa has no direct ownership in the company anymore (although he sits on the board), and, according to [Toyota spokesman](#) Carly Schaffner

DEI Holdings is not a direct supplier of Toyota; however, it is possible that Toyota dealers procure their products. As independent business owners, Toyota dealers make available to their customers a variety of aftermarket products to enhance their automotive ownership experience.

As far as his business activities encroaching on his chairmanship responsibilities, since taking over as chairman of the committee, Issa has overseen 28 full committee hearings, 59 subcommittee hearings and has sent 430 letters to the White House and federal agencies demanding information over matters in which he sees potential fraud and wrongdoing. Far from being a part-time legislator, Issa said that the *Times* article showed that his probes are getting under their skin in a big way, noting his committee's revelations about the ATF's Fast and Furious sting operations which allowed federal agents to sell guns to Mexican drug traffickers.

Issa went on the offensive when the *Times* refused to print a retraction, noting the Lichtblau article has raised very troubling questions about the journalistic ethics of Pulitzer Prize winning *New York Times* reporter Eric Lichtblau. If Lichtblau actually visited the building, why didn't he enter the congressman's office to ask a few questions and check out the view of the golf course? When pressed on the matter, Lichtblau said that he could see Issas building from the golf course, and naturally assumed that people in the building could also see the course. But the course is private, and when the *Union-Tribune* tried to check out Lichtblaus observation, The U-T was unable to gain access to the course, and so how did Lichtblau? The writer implies that he interviewed two individuals for his article in person: Dean Tilton and John Aguilera, while he was in town doing his investigation. But each of them said the interview took place over the phone.

Most damning was the note via Twitter from Lee Fang at [ThinkProgress](#), a left-wing blog site to the *New York Times* saying, Hey, your NYT Issa piece looks awfully familiar, referring to its blog entry of May 30th stating that Rep. Darrell Issa has a history of blending his personal business interests with his work as a member of Congress[and that] one of Issas most valuable properties, a medical building at 2067 West Vista Way in Vista, California, is called the Vista Medical Center, and was purchased in 2008 for \$16.6 million. Where was any attribution to that in Lichtblaus article? Issa wrote, Is the *New York Times* delaying corrections of obvious errors [like these] to protect the reputation of a Pulitzer Prize winning reporter?

Last Friday the *Times* added two additional corrections to the article:

An article on August 15th about Representative Darrell Issa's business dealings referred incorrectly



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to his sale of an AIM mutual fund in 2008 the purchase of the mutual fund resulted in a \$125,000 loss, not a \$357,000 gain.

And the article misstated the purchase price for a medical office plaza Mr. Issa's company bought in Vista, California, in 2008. It cost \$16.3 million not \$10.3 million. Therefore the value of the property remained essentially unchanged and did not rise 60 percent.

But Issa won't be getting a front-page retraction from the *Times*. In his letter to Issa on August 25th, Dean Baquet, the *Times* Assistant Managing Editor, said that Lichtblaus article was carefully reported, written, and edited, and we stand by the story both in its broad thrust and, except as noted, in its particular details. We do not believe a retraction is warranted.



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