

Look what I found

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In the course of doing research for this column, I sometimes come upon things that make my jaw drop. For example, with all the coverage of BP's exploits in the Gulf, I really wasn't up to speed about Transocean, the company that actually owns the deepwater platform.

According to the New York Times, the company is known for "testing local laws and regulations." Among other things, Transocean is accused of being involved in a drilling project in which money is being laundered for the country of Myanmar, "a repressive government which is under United States trade sanctions."

In addition, Transocean "has disclosed in Securities and Exchange Commission filings that its drilling equipment was shipped through Iran and that ... it did business in Syria. The State Department says Syria and Iran sponsor terrorism."

In Norway, Transocean is the focus of a criminal investigation into tax fraud to the tune of \$840 million. A similar tax fraud case is underway in Brazil. And in the U.S. "a federal bankruptcy judge recently found that one of Transocean's merger partners had repeatedly abused the legal system to try to avoid potential liability in a pollution case in Louisiana."

The bottom line is that Transocean's record is tarball dirty all over the world. That said, drilling companies like BP continue to do business with these dudes. Gee, no potential for problems under this scenario, eh?

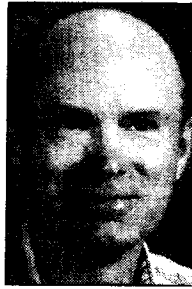
Now you might think that

there would be a cry of alarm coming from our elected leaders about shady dealings in the oil industry, wouldn't you? Well that's not going to happen because, according to a report in the Daily Beast, because: "At the moment, oil and gas companies are on track to shatter their record of total contributions from the last non-presidential election cycle, in 2006 ... the industry is on pace to spend more than \$27 million — the most ever in a campaign year not involving the White House."

Top recipients of this spending spree include Rep. Joe Barton (R-Texas) \$100,470 and Rep. Roy Blunt (R-Mo.) \$133,000. Among the top 10 recipients of oil money, six are Republicans and four are Democrats, but oil money is being spread at all levels of government.

The pathetically hilarious part of all this is that incumbents are slapping the oil industry with one hand, collecting oil money with the other hand, and at the same time can't figure out why voters out there in America are so disgusted with them.

On to Afghanistan, America's longest running war and a major reason why our economy is in such tough shape. This will make you want to hit yourself in the head with a ball-peen hammer — guess where the Pentagon proposes to buy helicopters and



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aircraft from for the Iraq, Pakistan and Afghanistan armies.

You might assume the easy answer would be "from companies in the United States." This would be logical because the U.S.A. has spent billions of dollars and thousands of lives in these cesspools over the past decade.

The unbelievable answer is Russia. So far, according to the Wall Street Journal: "Pakistan

has received 10 Russian-made helicopters at U.S. taxpayer expense and U.S. counter-insurgency funds have paid for the overhaul of a dozen Pakistani (helicopters). Iraq's military operates a fleet of 18 (Russian made helicopters) with another 22 on order, eight of which were paid for by the U.S. government. The Department of Defense has bought 31 (Russian helicopters) for Afghanistan's security forces and the pending defense budget for fiscal 2011 includes a \$180 million request for the procurement of 10 additional for Afghanistan."

The WSJ reports: "Some U.S. lawmakers want the government to consider buying American-made equipment to support the U.S. economy. The House version of the fiscal 2011 defense authorization bill says U.S.-made helicopters should be among the options when the U.S. considers buying aircraft for

the Afghan air force."

Gee, do you think? We pay the freight for the war, our soldiers die in the cause, but when it comes to spending taxpayer money on equipment, the dollars (and jobs) go to Russia?

On this deal the Pentagon is wrong, the Obama administration is wrong, and lawmakers who only want to "consider" and put the U.S. "among the options" are wrong. If there ever was a case where "Buy American" should be the one and only option, this is it.

The world has gone bonkers and I can prove it! Several news sources report that the Army is ditching Velcro as a pocket closure on its uniforms. They began testing alternatives last year. At one point someone thought perhaps asking the soldiers in the field their opinions might be worthwhile, so the Army did a survey. Only 11 percent of soldiers wanted to keep the Velcro. Another 29 percent liked snaps. But a whopping 60 percent were proponents on a new high-tech solution to the problem of pocket closures breaking free and thus allowing pocket contents to spill upon the ground. The new item is silent, does not clog with dirt, is impervious to heat and cold, is easily repaired in the field, and almost never fails to keep a pocket closed. The high-tech discovery? Buttons. Sounds bonkers, but it's true.

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