

Committee questions conduct of Tom DeLay

It is the second time the House majority leader's political actions have been criticized this week

BY LARRY MARGASAK
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — The House ethics committee Wednesday criticized House Majority Leader Tom DeLay for conduct that appeared to link political donations to legislation and for improperly contacting U.S. aviation authorities for political purposes, House sources said Wednesday.

The committee's findings were an extraordinary second rebuke of the Texas Republican's ethical conduct in just six days.

The committee of five Democrats and five Republicans deferred to Texas authorities allegations that DeLay violated state campaign finance rules.

The committee's findings — a report admonishing his conduct —

nonetheless spared him a lengthy investigation by the ethics panel. By concluding the case with no more than a report on DeLay's conduct, the investigation is unlikely to affect his ability to push the Republican agenda through the House if the GOP retains its majority.

Last Thursday the same committee, in an investigative report, admonished DeLay for offering to support the House candidacy of a Michigan lawmaker's son, in return for the lawmaker's vote for a Medicare prescription drug benefit.

The committee acted on a three-

part complaint from Rep. Chris Bell, D-Texas. The allegations accused DeLay of soliciting political contributions from Westar Energy, a Kansas company, in return for legislative favors; violating Texas laws prohibiting corporate political donations; and improperly contacting aviation authorities to track down a plane carrying Texas Democratic legislators who were trying to defeat a DeLay-engineered congressional re-districting plan.

Westar executives made a \$25,000 donation to an organization affiliated with DeLay just before attending a

two-day get-together at a Virginia resort with the House GOP leader.

The committee said there was a "significant gap" between the Westar allegations — accusing DeLay of actually soliciting contributions in return for legislative favors — and the panel's findings.

"The information we obtained indicates that neither Representative DeLay nor anyone acting on his behalf improperly solicited contributions from Westar, and Representative DeLay took no action with regard to Westar that would constitute an impermissible special favor," the report said.

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Japan relatively unscathed after 5.8-magnitude earthquake

There were no reports of major damage in Tokyo, but four people were injured

BY KENJI HALL
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

TOKYO — An earthquake struck eastern Japan late Wednesday, shaking buildings in Tokyo and injuring four people. There were no reports of major damage.

The 5.8-magnitude quake hit at 11:40 p.m. and was centered some 40 miles beneath the earth's surface in Ibaraki state, northeast of the capital, the Meteorological Agency said.

A magnitude-5 earthquake can cause damage to homes if it occurs in a residential area. But the depth of the

temblor dampened much of its potentially destructive power.

The temblor, which lasted more than 30 seconds, was most strongly felt in Tsukuba city, in Ibaraki state, and Miyashiro town, in Saitama state, the agency said. Office buildings and homes in Tokyo swayed for about 10 seconds. It also shook cities in Tochigi, Chiba, Gunma, Kanagawa, Shizuoka and Nagano prefectures.

The National Police Agency said four people suffered minor injuries. Tsukuba city police spokesman Nobuo Abe said there were no reports of

quake-related damage. He said the temblor wasn't strong enough to dislodge items from shelves.

Tokyo Electric Power Co. official Katsuya Uchino said power plants and electricity services across the region were unaffected.

However, the quake triggered an automatic safety device on trains, temporarily bringing railway transport in Tokyo and other areas to a halt, according to Japanese media. Service was resumed minutes later, the reports said.

There was no danger of tsunami — or huge waves triggered by seismic activity — the agency said.

Japan, which rests atop several tectonic plates, is among the most earthquake-prone countries in the world.

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