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Bush was not informed of Enron's plea for help

WASHINGTON (AP)—Two Bush cabinet members said Sunday they never considered intervening in Enron's spiral toward bankruptcy, nor informed President Bush of requests for help from the fallen energy giant.

"Companies come and go. It's ... part of the genius of capitalism," said Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill, when asked if he was surprised at the sudden collapse of Enron. The company's failure has left the one-time energy trading behemoth's stock virtually worthless and thousands of workers' pension funds in disarray.

Last fall, a month before declaring bankruptcy, O'Neill received two telephone calls from Enron's chief executive, Kenneth Lay. Lay also called Commerce Secretary Don Evans at the time, reaching out for help to harness the energy company's financial slide.

O'Neill's view of Enron's collapse was characterized as "cold-blooded" and reflective of "the 18th century, but not the 21st century" by Sen. Joseph Lieberman, D-Conn., whose Committee on Governmental Affairs is leading Senate investigations into the Enron debacle.

Separately, Lieberman said that an internal Arthur Andersen LLP memo on Oct. 12 directing that all but basic Enron working papers be destroyed "raises very serious questions about whether obstruction of justice occurred."

Andersen this past week revealed that Enron documents had been destroyed. But Lieberman said most troubling was that the

memo, disclosed in a report in Time magazine, "was specifically about Enron" and not a general directive to clean out files. Congressional investigators want to find out why Andersen did not raise flags about Enron's business practices.

Lieberman and Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., said on CBS' "Face the Nation" the administration may have been right in

McCain, a longtime voice of campaign finance reform, said Cain acknowledged getting \$9,500 in Enron contributions to two Senate campaigns.

Lieberman, who said he received \$1,000 from Enron in 1994 Senate campaign, said focus of his committee's investigation will be "whether any influence" from Enron affected the administration's

Contributions from Enron
President Bush has received more money from Enron, its employees and their relatives over his political career than from any other source. This amount includes Bush's unsuccessful House campaign in 1978, two campaigns for Texas governor, renovation of his governor's office, his presidential race, inaugurations and his presidential recount fund.

Among the contributions to his campaigns and other causes:

Texas governor's races	\$122,500 from Enron CEO Kenneth Lay and his wife, Linda Lay At least \$160,000 from other Enron employees and their relatives
2000 presidential campaign	At least \$30,000 from Enron political action committee At least \$113,800 from Enron's PAC, its employees and their relatives, including \$2,000 each from Kenneth and Linda Lay Kenneth Lay also raised at least \$100,000 for the campaign as a member of the Bush "Pioneers."
Presidential inaugural gala	\$100,000 from Enron; \$100,000 from Kenneth and Linda Lay
Presidential recount	\$5,000 each from Kenneth and Linda Lay \$500 from Enron employee Hal Elrod

SOURCES: Center for Public Integrity; Center for Responsive Politics; Texas for Public Justice

not intervening to try to save Enron. But they said the government's response — as well as earlier federal monitoring of its business practices — may have been hampered by the energy company's free-wheeling flow of campaign contributions.

"We're all tainted by the millions and millions of dollars that were contributed by Enron executives, which ... creates the appearance of impropriety," said

ding of the Enron collapse oversight by federal agencies.

"I don't feel at all compromised," Lieberman added, referring to his committee's investigation.

Since 1990, Enron and its employees contributed \$5.7 billion to political campaigns about three-fourths of it to candidates. About half of money was spent in the election, with President Bush a major beneficiary.

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