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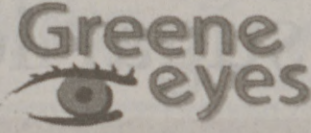
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VIP

Continued from page 1

Though the VIP program is related to A&M's diversity initiatives as part of Vision 2020, it is not limited to minority students, Ashley said.

"We're trying to combat any negative perceptions of A&M that people may have," Ashley said. "To do that, we need to bring students to the campus."

Ashley said the VIP program was created with the hope that prospective students who have already been admitted to the University will fall in love with A&M after having had the trip in a small group of fewer than 20 students.

"It can make the difference as far as students who are being courted by other institutions or don't know much about A&M," McClendon said.

A&M President Robert M. Gates said he thinks that the VIP program has great promise.

"Our experience shows that if we can get students to campus and let them see it and experience the friendly atmosphere here, the likelihood they will enroll here is significantly increased," Gates said. "The entire admissions office has worked very hard, and we are seeing noteworthy increases in the number of applications and admittances of underrepresented students."

Gates said if A&M is successful in getting a substantial number of these underrepresented students to enroll this fall, the University will stop the seven-year decline in the number of these students at A&M and show real growth.

"There are many other institutions that can offer the same academic excellence as A&M," McClendon said. "But there's something special about A&M. We're unique because we have a family atmosphere and relationships, and even though we're large we find a way to shrink the campus."

National PAC gave money to House candidates

By Suzanne Gamboa
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — U.S. House Majority Leader Tom DeLay's national fund-raising committee contributed to 15 Texas legislative candidates whose campaign finances are under a state criminal investigation because of possible improper contributions during the 2002 election.

While DeLay's national fund-raising committee is not the focus of the investigation, he helped found the probe's target, Texans for a Republican Majority, and records obtained by The Associated Press show the breadth of his influence in providing financial support to Republican candidates in Texas.

Americans for a Republican Majority Political Action Committee made contributions totaling \$24,000 to the candidates in 2002. The checks sent to them bear DeLay's name and title as the PAC's chairman and were dated Oct. 22, 2002, according to records obtained by The Associated Press and filed with the Federal Election Commission.

DeLay and his aide Jim Ellis helped start a separate PAC, Texans for a Republican Majority, in 2001 with \$75,000 from Americans for a Republican Majority. The state PAC is under investigation for allegedly using corporate money to influence the 2002 races, which would be illegal under Texas law.

Some of the donors to each PAC overlap and Ellis is a paid adviser to Texans for a

Republican Majority as well as executive director of DeLay's national political committee. DeLay served on the Texas group's advisory board, which decided whom the Texas group should endorse.

Federal fund-raising committees like DeLay's often contribute to state races, which is allowable under the law.

"When you see those patterns of contributions, it really raises questions of whether or not there's been some sort of coordination."

— Larry Noble
Center for Responsive Politics
executive director

Democrats and watchdog groups say the contributions underscore the coordination between DeLay and the PACs to elect a Republican majority in the Texas Legislature in 2002 — the first time since Reconstruction that the GOP controlled the Texas House.

Those legislators went on to shape how congressional voting districts were redrawn in Texas last year, giving Republicans a better chance in the 2004 elections at winning the majority in the state's 16-16 congressional delegation. If the strategy pays off in November, Texas will have the largest GOP

congressional delegation in the country.

"When you see those patterns of contributions, it really raises questions of whether or not there's been some sort of coordination," said Larry Noble, executive director of the Center for Responsive Politics, a campaign finance watchdog group in Washington.

But an attorney for the Republican said the critics are making too much of the contributions.

"It is not surprising that ARMPAC was giving money to the same races that TRM PAC was. It was easy to identify what races were winnable, what races they were supporting," said Terry Scarborough, an Austin attorney representing Bill Ceverha, treasurer of the Texas political fund raising committee.

"I think the conspiracy theorists are trying to make more out of this than there is," he said. Craig McDonald, executive director of Texans for Public Justice, a political watchdog group, said while the relationship of the two PACs is well known, the contributions "show the degree to which Tom DeLay was intimately involved in moving corporate money into the Texas elections."

Records of Americans for a Republican Majority were subpoenaed by Travis County District Attorney Ronnie Earle as part of an investigation. The grand jury is hearing testimony in the case to determine whether charges are warranted. So far, no one has been accused of any wrongdoing.

Checks distributed to the House candidates were accompanied by a letter written on stationery from Texans for a Republican Majority.

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THE BATTALION

Elizabeth N. Webb, Editor in Chief

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