



## FRONT PAGE

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[DC Federal Courts](#)  
[4th Circuit](#)  
[Federal Circuit](#)  
[DC Courts](#)**Resources**[Legal Business](#)  
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[Technology Reports](#)  
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[Salary Watch](#)  
[Online Q&As](#)  
[Century Issue](#)  
[Metro D.C. 100](#)

## Inadmissible

Monday, March 6, 2000

### House Pushes Tougher Campaign Law

The conviction last week of a fund-raiser for Vice President **Al Gore** is one of the biggest victories yet for the oft-criticized Justice Department campaign finance task force.

**Maria Hsia**, a Los Angeles immigration consultant, was found guilty in D.C. federal court of illegally funneling \$109,000 to the Democratic Party during the 1996 presidential election.

And while Hsia awaits sentencing, legislation is moving through Congress that aims to make it easier to get convictions in future campaign finance cases.

Rep. **Dan Burton** (R-Ind.) - chairman of the House Government Reform Committee and a critic of DOJ's campaign finance probe - is pushing a bill that would give Justice sharper tools to go after those who use third parties, or "conduits," to funnel money to political campaigns or parties.

The bill would raise the punishment for knowingly making contributions on behalf of illegal donors from a misdemeanor to a felony. The measure, which has 61 co-sponsors (only three of whom are Democrats), would also increase the civil penalties for such violations, close loopholes surrounding foreign campaign contributions, and would require the Federal Election Commission to refer cases to the Justice Department when it finds probable cause that a willful conduit contribution has been made.

Hsia was convicted of five counts of causing false statements to be made to the FEC - a convoluted, hard-to-prove charge used by the feds in part because it's a felony.

"You may as well cut to the chase and say that these crimes are bad from the get-go," says **Jim Wilson**, Burton's chief committee counsel.

One DOJ official agrees that the bill could deter would-be campaign finance violators, saying, "There's no question that most people who are mindful of the law will think twice if something they're doing will result in a felony."

But a House Democratic leadership aide says he's suspicious of the Burton bill, given the fiercely partisan nature of its lead sponsor and the dearth of Dem supporters. "Single rifle shots like this are not particularly useful," says the aide.

- Sam Skolnik

### Above the Law by Joe Azar





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### The Perfect Crime?

**Arnold & Porter's** high-tech security system proved no match for an intrepid thief who walked away with \$20,000 in petty cash from the firm's safe. According to D.C. Police Sgt. **Joe Gentile**, the firm reported the money missing from a locked safe on Feb. 17. "How the person gained entry is unknown," says Gentile. The firm's security system includes camera surveillance and roaming guards, and all lawyers and staff have coded badges limiting their access to designated areas. As of late last week, no arrests had been made and firm leaders still hadn't told partners and associates about the incident. Police would not say whether they have any suspects. Arnold & Porter managing partner **James Sandman** declines comment.

- Tom Schoenberg

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### Strange Bedfellows

Among the many amicus briefs streaming into the Supreme Court in advance of oral arguments in the case of *Boy Scouts of America v. James Dale* is an unexpected one by the libertarian **Institute for Justice** on behalf of a group called **Gays and Lesbians for Individual Liberty**. Dale is the New Jersey Scout leader who was ousted because of his sexual orientation, and most gay rights groups are siding with him. But not GLIL. "We oppose the Boy Scouts policy," says group president **Richard Sincere**. "But we also oppose letting the government dictate a group's membership policies." In 1999, the New Jersey Supreme Court said the Boy Scouts could not exclude gays. If the high court upholds that ruling, Sincere thinks it could come back to haunt gay groups that might someday want to keep their own organizations or protest marches from being infiltrated by anti-gay individuals. Other gay groups, says Sincere, "don't see the long-term consequences. Equality is more important to them than liberty."

- Tony Mauro

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### Hot Seat

U.S. District Judge **Emmet Sullivan** has wiped away a default judgment against the D.C. court system - but there may be more fireworks to come in a case brought by three court-appointed lawyers and an investigator. After warning the parties to stop bickering and get down to business, Sullivan vacated the default at a Feb. 29 hearing. Angry over the court system's persistent delays in paying them for defense work under the Criminal Justice Act, the lawyers are now seeking interest on back pay. They already have deposed former Executive Officer **Ulysses Hammond** and Acting Executive **Anne Wicks**. **Gary Sidell** and **Steven Polin** indicated at the hearing that they want to depose the judges who sit on the courts' Joint Committee on Judicial Administration. **Jack Simmons III**, an assistant corporation counsel who is defending the courts, argued that questioning judges is unnecessary.

- Carrie Johnson

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### Money Money Money

Add one more local firm to [the list](#). On March 3, D.C.'s **Covington & Burling** became the latest to announce across-the-board associate salary increases, bringing first-year base pay to \$125,000. Including bonuses, Covington's newest lawyers can take home a whopping \$162,500. But like other firms, along with the big bucks comes a higher billable-hour expectation - previously 1,800, now 1,950.

- Vanessa Blum

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### Democracy: Who Needs It?

Changing leadership every year may make a law firm a more egalitarian workplace, but it can

also make it hard to get anything done. At least that's what partners at D.C.'s **Crowell & Moring** decided last week when they voted to replace the firm's old management structure with a more streamlined version. Day-to-day operations will now be handled by a three-member executive committee, chaired by a partner who may serve for up to six years. "We've had the same management structure since we were just 53 lawyers; now we're almost five times that. This will allow us to be more nimble and efficient," says founding partner **John MacLeod**, who was elected chairman on March 3. But some decisions, like partner compensation, will still be made by a larger management board.

- Vanessa Blum

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### Delay of Game

Accused drug kingpin **Tommy Edelin** has been having a bad year. He's already been notified by U.S. Attorney **Wilma Lewis** that she intends to seek the death penalty against him. But Edelin won a round Feb. 28 when he persuaded U.S. District Judge **Royce Lamberth** to give him a new court-appointed attorney. At a lengthy, closed-door hearing, Edelin and his lawyers, **Thomas Abbenante** and **Claudia Von-Previoux**, aired their disagreements. Word is, Lamberth is appointing veteran defense attorney **James Rudasill** to replace them. Bringing in a new lawyer could mean that Edelin and his co-defendants will not face trial until 2001.

- Carrie Johnson



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