

## Nolan fought the good fight in Sacramento

**W**hittaker Chambers once stated that the problem with conservatives is that they did not take care of their wounded. Pat Nolan, the former Assembly Republican leader, recently gave up a struggle against the U.S. Attorney's Office and resigned his seat. He also submitted to 33 months in prison.

I first met Pat when Ronald Reagan first ran for governor in 1966. As state high school chairman of Youth For Reagan, I appointed Pat to his first political job. He became the Burbank chairman of Youth For Reagan. In 1978, he was a surprise victor in a hotly contested Assembly race. He was part of a new breed of conservatives called "the Proposition 13 babies." Throughout the '80s he led the fight against the stifling control of the Assembly by Willie Brown. Try as he might, Pat could not overcome Democrat money and power or fight the reapportionment dynamics to bring about a Republican majority in the California Assembly.

Pat battled yearly against the absolute power of Willie Brown. Even if Republicans won the governorship, there seemed no way of breaking the Democrat gridlock over both houses in the California Legislature. Big business and big labor gave generously to Willie Brown to buy peace but permitted the Democrats to perpetuate their power. How ironic, Pat thought, that the business community dug its own grave for more regulation and more taxes by supporting the very party that despises free-market principles.

More ironic is how Pat got stung by the FBI and the U.S. attorney.

Karen Watson, a special assistant for Pat Nolan, became the key instrument in Pat's downfall. She wanted to become a lobbyist and got ensnared with the FBI's informer, John Shahabian. Shahabian worked for Democrat Sen. David Roberti. After being caught for demanding cash to help on legislation, he agreed to work for the FBI by entrapping other individuals if the government would go easy on his own criminal case. Karen talked too much to Shahabian and soon found herself in a room with FBI agents. Knowing that Karen is a single mother

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▶ **THE ISSUE:** Assemblyman Pat Nolan was swept up by a remorseless federal government sting operation after years of trying to reform politics in Sacramento.

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with one child, they informed her that they had enough information to put her in jail for 10 years and that she would never see her child grow up. After denying Pat did anything wrong, she broke and agreed to "cooperate" with the FBI to target her boss.

Pat Nolan has never been accused by the government of seeking money for himself. He is accused of asking for money for other Republican candidates in exchange for influencing his vote on specific legislation. However, Pat has never sold his vote to anyone, because he is ideologically committed to changing the way government works, not merely striving for a political career. Not to understand that is not to understand the sacrifice and the high ideals of those individuals who are part of the conservative movement. The FBI treated Pat Nolan as if he were a drug lord, not an ideologically committed proponent of free-market reform.

After the initial FBI raid of 1988, Nolan heard nothing until May of 1993. Three days before the statute of limitations expired, the outgoing U.S. attorney, desperate to keep his job, saw to it that the indictment was filed in time.

Pat shouldered the challenge, realizing he was facing one of the most powerful, well-financed, and ruthless prosecutorial bodies in the world.

Investigators saw to it that one former employee of Pat, who had put false information on an application for a real estate loan, was convicted of a felony. Still, that employee refused to "cooperate" with the authorities against Nolan. There was simply nothing to report. Hundreds of lobbyists were contacted by the investigators. Virtually none volunteered that Pat extorted them or their clients. Did he ask lobbyists for money?

Yes — as all politicians do. But was it in exchange for a vote on a specific piece of legislation? Of course not.

Despite the thousands of man-hours by the U.S. attorney's office and its investigators, their efforts turned up one person as their key witness against Nolan. The evidence did not change over the years.

What has changed, however, is the public's perception of politicians and scandals in Sacramento. Nolan's attorneys attempted to change the venue away from Sacramento. The Sacramento area, as the polling evidence by the Steinberg Poll proved, has a significantly higher percentage of individuals who work for the government. This is one of the most pro-government jurisdictions in the United States. The U.S. attorney knew he could put on a mediocre case and probably win at least one conviction.

Under the federal guidelines, one conviction of a "minor" count would mean a minimum of nine years in jail for Nolan.

I was with Pat in Sacramento when I heard the bad news. Pat informed me that he now faced the same problem that Karen Watson faced years before. Pat has three children, the youngest 1 year old, the oldest, 5. Should he risk a trial and let the jury "compromise" and find at least one charge against him? If so, he would not see his children grow during their most important years.

Pat finally had enough. He agreed to the government deal. They were prepared to offer him 24 months if he would "cooperate." Pat will not falsely testify against another. He will spend 33 months in jail instead. So Pat was forced to "admit" to activities he never committed. Pat resigned his seat. He will probably not be able to practice law, nor can he vote. And yet, we see all over the nation that people can mutilate, kill their parents, and crush skulls with bricks and serve no appreciable time.

Those running the U.S. attorney's office must appreciate this great injustice. But the general public most likely will not. Those in the conservative movement need to understand that we have a wounded soldier and we should not soon forget how Pat Nolan tried to reform Sacramento.