

Whistle-blower deserves medal, gets grilling instead

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It's time for newly minted Attorney General Stu Rabner to pull the plug on the marathon deposition-taking in the Board of Public Utilities whistle-blower case. So far it has cost taxpayers \$265,000.

There's more to come because Democrat-connected lawyer Angelo Genova hasn't submitted bills. He used to be the lawyer for the Democratic State Committee and is the guy Gov. Jon S. Corzine chose to represent the state in labor negotiations.

Before that, Genova represented the campaign of Sen. Bob Menendez, D-N.J., whose campaign manager was Steve DiMicco, who is married to Jeanne Fox, president of the BPU, the outfit being sued by Joe Potena, BPU's chief financial officer.

Potena's suit maintains his supervisors became critical of his work and threatened insubordination charges after he alerted the state Treasury Department the BPU had set up a secret bank account with at least \$80 million in it.

The bank account and several BPU workers are under criminal investigation, thanks to Potena. Lots of folks are looking bad, not to mention worried.

You'd think Corzine, who came in on a clean-government pledge, would be giving Potena the state's highest medal. But, no. Private lawyers from four firms hired by the state quizzed Potena for hours on end about things like his medical history and his children's education. And got paid \$175 an hour to do it. That's your money.

New Jersey doesn't limit how much time lawyers can take to depose witnesses — what a shock, huh? Our Greg Volpe found the federal courts do.

Besides Democratic insider Genova, the other private law firms hired include one founded by former Gov. Jim Florio. The guy who appointed the four private law firms was former Attorney General Peter "See No Evil" Harvey, the gift that keeps on giving.

It may have been started under Harvey, but it is under the administration of Corzine and Rabner now. Assemblywoman Amy H. Handlin, R-Monmouth, wrote Rabner a letter questioning how private law firms are selected by the state and whether those high fees are necessary.

"... I don't think taxpayers would appreciate knowing that their resources are being used to scare off the little guy who is trying to shine a light on potential violations of procurement, nepotism and cronyism," Handlin said.

Never learn: The state learned nothing from Potena's situation. A financial officer at UMDNJ filed suit claiming that, when he tried to blow the whistle on an alleged scheme to cover up more than \$35 million in excessive bills, his desk was moved to a lunchroom.

Michael Nappe said in an interview he was moved to an area with a coffee maker and microwave as neighbors after he spoke to the federal monitor looking into UMDNJ's operations.

In his lawsuit, Nappe said the university was paying as much as 77 cents per minute for long-distance calls. You have to work hard to get it that bad.

Meanwhile, UMDNJ has been hit with yet another suit, the third in less than a month. This one from Kathryn Gibbons, former finance official, who says school administrators conspired to obstruct a criminal probe. More lawsuits are expected, and the school's bond rating dropped.

Back to Rabner: Published reports say he has cut 120 jobs in the Department of Law and Public Safety. Since January, 1,200 state jobs have been eliminated, including some 400 political appointees. Corzine's office said efforts to reduce the 83,000-member state work force will continue. Worried bureaucrats are starting to think he's serious.

What a shock: Sen. Henry P. McNamara, R-Bergen, noticed Atlantic City officials convicted of bribery are receiving pension checks while a bill to mandate pension forfeiture for crooked public officials is mired in the Senate's budget committee.