








Sen. Reid calls US Congress 'most corrupt in history'

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By Thomas Ferraro

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - U.S. Senate Democratic leader Harry Reid called the Republican-led Congress "the most corrupt in history" on Sunday, and distanced himself from lobbyist Jack Abramoff, at the center of an escalating probe.

The Justice Department is investigating whether Jack Abramoff directed illegal payoffs to lawmakers, including Rep. Tom DeLay of Texas, who was forced to step down as House Republican leader in September after indicted in his home state of Texas on unrelated charges.

MORE  "Don't lump me in with Jack Abramoff. This is a Republican scandal," Reid told Fox News Sunday, saying he never received any money from Abramoff.

Reid, like many members of Congress, Democrats and Republicans, has received campaign contributions from Abramoff clients. Some lawmakers have returned those donations, but Reid gave no indication he would do so.

The Securities and Exchange Commission has been examining stock sales by Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, a Tennessee Republican, and last month Randy "Duke" Cunningham, a California Republican, resigned from the House after pleading guilty of taking more than \$2.4 million in bribes involving defense contracts.

Democrats have accused Republicans of "a culture of corruption," and plan to make it an issue in next year's congressional elections.

"America can do better than what we've done," said Reid. "The most corrupt Congress in the history of the country. We have such significant problems with what's going on in this country."

Most of the federal investigative focus is now on Abramoff, whose lobbying activities, particularly on behalf of Indian tribal clients, are also being examined by Congress.

Appearing on Fox TV, Reid said, "Abramoff gave me no money. His firm gave me no money. He may have worked (at) a firm where people have given me money."

A Reid aide later explained that the senator received money from a political action committee affiliated with a firm where Abramoff had worked, but Abramoff did not contribute to it.

"I feel totally at ease that I haven't done anything that is even close to being wrong," Reid said.

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