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Walker defends actions on behalf of CFG, says nothing wrong with raising money for group

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KENOSHA -- Gov. Scott Walker Saturday defended his actions directing campaign contributions to the Wisconsin Club for Growth, saying “there isn’t anything wrong” with doing so.

Details on Walker’s fundraising on behalf of the 501(c)(4) were included in a batch of documents briefly released late Friday as part of an ongoing suit over a John Doe investigation into allegations that Walker coordinated with conservative groups in the recall elections.

A federal judge has halted the probe, ruling the activity prosecutors were looking into was not illegal because the groups were engaged in issue advocacy. That decision is on appeal.

Walker dismissed the investigation as a “political witch hunt” and said, “For any of the things that we’ve done, there isn’t anything wrong” with his actions on behalf of the group.

Asked if he is still soliciting donations for Wisconsin Club for Growth, Walker said, “I’m still soliciting donations right now for my campaign and for the party, nobody else.” Asked when was he last asked for donations to Wisconsin Club for Growth, Walker said he didn’t know.

The documents released Friday also included details for the first time on a \$700,000 donation from Gogebic Taconite to the Wisconsin Club for Growth. Noting lawmakers and Walker eventually approved legislation making it easier for the company to site a mine in northern Wisconsin and then restricting access to the area, a lawyer for the special prosecutor in the probe wrote in one filing “there is certainly an appearance of corruption” considering the coordination between the Club for Growth and Walker’s agents.

But the gov said today he was not aware of the \$700,000 contribution. He also rejected the notion the legislation lawmakers approved following such a large contribution created a "pay for play" situation.

"That’s a ridiculous argument, because long before that recall, we were talking about our support for the mine in northern Wisconsin because you have Iron County with 12.5 percent unemployment," Walker said. "I don’t think anyone

should be shocked about that."

Dem gov rival Mary Burke said she's been critical of Walker's approach to the mining legislation and learning that he personally steered donations to the Club for Growth is "frankly appalling and if it isn't illegal, it should be."

"That is not the Wisconsin way," Burke said. "It's time for a governor focused on creating jobs for Wisconsin and who will put an end to this politics first nonsense."

Walker also knocked the John Doe probe in general while talking to reporters.

"This is a prime example of a political witch hunt that went on that was actually done not once, but twice," Walker said. "I think it's pretty clear in terms of the state judge in particular, a retired Court of Appeals judge well-respected, not politically aligned to anyone, and then a federal judge on top of that, both of them looked it over and not just questioned it, they dismissed it."

Challenged on his pledge to govern with transparency, given that groups like Wisconsin Club for Growth are designed for secrecy, Walker replied, "Our transparency is with me, personally."

One of Walker's associates referred to the Club for Growth as "your 501c4" in an email to the gov, but he rejected that description today.

"No, it's been around a long time."

Walker spoke with reporters after addressing supporters at the state GOP's field office here.

Dressed in a red Wisconsin Badgers polo and khakis, Walker told the crowd, "We've got a tough battle ahead of us."

"I believe in a tight, tight elections like the one we're facing, that personal contact makes all the difference," Walker said.

*By Kay Nolan
For WisPolitics.com*