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Columbus gala panel's finances raise questions

December 18, 1990 | By Jeff Gerth | Jeff Gerth, New York Times News Service

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WASHINGTON -- The presidential [commission](#) coordinating the international celebration of the 500th anniversary of Columbus' voyage to the New World is under congressional scrutiny for its finances, focusing on the activities of its chairman, John N. Goudie, a prominent Miami Republican and party fund-raiser who resigned from the commission yesterday.

The 5-year-old commission is \$600,000 in arrears on an agreement with Spain, which has built replicas of Columbus' three ships and is planning to have them follow Columbus' path to America and tour American ports.

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The commission cannot pay Spain because Texaco Inc. -- which pledged \$5 million over five years to sponsor the tour of the the Nina, the Pinta and the Santa Maria -- raised questions about that voyage and has stopped its donations.

Mr. Goudie and Texaco officials said there was a complicated contractual dispute over the arrangements for the tour.

In a telephone interview, Mr. Goudie said he had resigned yesterday

from the unsalaried post. There has been no word from the White House on whether the resignation has been accepted or when it might take effect.

Mr. Goudie denied any wrongdoing in connection with the affair.

He said he resigned because publicity over the Texaco matter and other problems were jeopardizing a possible multimillion-dollar pledge from another major sponsor, the [Chrysler](#) Corp., for other Columbus activities.

The problems were reported earlier this month in Special Events Report, a newsletter for people involved in public celebrations like the Columbus quincentenary.

Mr. Goudie said that when he received a letter from Chrysler yesterday involving the pledge, he decided to send his letter of resignation to President Bush.

"It's time for me to bow out," he said, adding that the commission needed "some favorable [publicity](#)." He would not say what was in Chrysler's letter.

A House Post Office and Civil Service subcommittee with jurisdiction over the celebration has been looking at whether contracts awarded by the Christopher Columbus Quincentenary Jubilee Commission were properly let.

The congressional panel, whose chairman is Thomas C. Sawyer, D-Ohio, plans to hold hearings next year after an audit of the quincentenary commission by the General Accounting Office, according to a committee aide.

Some of the arrangements under scrutiny involve friends of Mr. Goudie's, according both to him and to documents involving commission [business](#).

Earlier this year, Mr. Goudie, who is in the real estate business, raised money for the failed re-election effort of Gov. Bob Martinez, the Florida Republican whom Mr. Bush nominated this month to succeed William J. Bennett as director of National Drug Control Policy.

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Mr. Goudie said in an interview last week that he had asked for campaign contributions from some people doing business with the Columbus quincenary commission. He insisted that all his fund-raising activities had been proper.

These efforts came at the same time Mr. Goudie was trying unsuccessfully to get the Florida Real Estate Commission to reconsider its 1989 revocation of his real estate license. His license was revoked for misappropriating escrow [funds](#), according to Florida state documents.

The real estate commission found that the misappropriations in Mr. Goudie's company escrow account included \$10,000 in donations to the Florida Republican Party in 1988.

Mr. Goudie said the account was not a conventional escrow account and that he had properly used it for his business.

The 30-member quincenary commission was organized in 1985, with President Ronald Reagan picking most of the commissioners and Congress the rest.

The commission includes business leaders, politicians, academics and some Cabinet officials, like the secretaries of state and commerce.

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