

# Power

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the Dallas Cowboys.

It is one of several criss-crossing relationships that have made the 59-year-old attorney a fixture at City Hall.

Some residents think Power might have a conflict of interest because he is employed by the City of Irving while he represents other clients in dealings with the city.

Others say he simply is a talented lawyer whose adeptness with government bureaucracy has allowed him to build a successful practice.

Former Mayor Robert Pierce describes Power as a modern-day Benjamin Franklin.

"You just kind of have to grow up out here to understand why people go to Bob for advice on all sorts of legal matters," Pierce said.

City Councilman Morris Parrish, however, says potential conflicts involving Power have been ignored for years. He also contends that Power has an easier time getting city approval than other lawyers.

"I guarantee you he feels as comfortable at City Hall as we do," Parrish said.

Among the episodes cited by critics as potential conflicts:

- When real estate developers conceived the Las Colinas business park in the late 1970s, it was Power who laid out their plans for the city.

- When managers of Texas Stadium Corp. sought city approval to sell alcoholic beverages two years ago, Power made their case at City Hall.

- And while the Irving Convention & Visitors Bureau tackles the subject of building a dome on Texas Stadium, Power is serving on the bureau's board of directors.

"He is about as well-connected a person as there is in our city," said former Irving Chamber of Commerce President Bob Doan. "And that's because he makes it his business."

Power, whose law firm Power & Deatherage is located near the center of town, said he sees nothing wrong with representing clients at City Hall while also working for the city.

The situation has occurred several times, he said, and only one City Council member has raised questions.

"I work to avoid any conflict," he added.

Power set up his practice in Irving during the 1960s. He served four years on the City Council and then four years as mayor before retiring from elective office in 1971.

Experts in the ethics of the legal profession said his dual relationship at City Hall could raise questions.

Eddie Vassallo of the Dallas Bar

Association called it "a scenario that could bring about a conflict."

Vassallo, chairman of the association's grievance committee, said Power has access to privileged information about the city that could be useful to some of his other clients.

Similarly, Vassallo said, an attorney who counsels a married couple would have difficulty later representing one partner in a divorce action.

Michelle Monse, a law professor at Southern Methodist University, agreed that Power could be running afoul of the rules for professional conduct.

Referring to the Dallas Cowboys' recent permit application, Monse said, "There's a potential for a conflict in that, certainly."

The permit, approved by the City Council without debate on May 5, will allow the Cowboys to build a new parking lot near Texas Stadium.

Veteran observers of City Hall say the question of whether Power wields too much clout has been debated several times over the years — but never reconciled publicly.

Pierce said questions have been raised off and on "as long as I can remember."

The questioning intensified when Power's law firm was hired in 1989 to represent the city in its fight to block D/FW Airport expansion.

Pierce, who was mayor at the time, now agrees that the relationship "doesn't look good."

The city's newly elected mayor, Bobby Joe Raper, says he was questioned about the arrangement on the campaign trail. Raper, however, says he is reluctant to jeopardize Power's valued service to the city in the high-stakes battle with D/FW.

"That's the ultimate thing," he said.

Councilman Parrish disagrees. He says the ultimate issue is whether Irving citizens believe they have a voice at City Hall.

Almost weekly, Parrish said, he hears concerns within the community about Power's access and influence. To many, he said, it appears the city is controlled by private interests — a perception that he blames for public apathy and low voter turnout.

"My intent is to have quality government," he said. "To do that, you need to examine the role of individuals in the government."

Power's firm also represents Irving Independent School District, although

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**Robert Pierce  
Former Irving mayor**

that client is assigned to his law partner, James Deatherage.

Parrish, a retired hospital administrator elected to the City Council two years ago, said he has been rebuffed repeatedly in trying to confront the issue.

He also found no support last year when he objected to Power's appointment by the

City Council to the board of the publicly funded Irving Convention & Visitors Bureau.

The convention bureau currently is deliberating a dome on Texas Stadium — still one of Power's clients.

"The public perceives him to be on both sides, and they question it," said Doan, the former Chamber of Commerce president.

City Councilman John Medaille, however, said he sees no problem unless the city and one of Power's other clients

end up in a lawsuit against each other.

Medaille, a councilman for 10 years, said there are no grounds to accuse Power of a conflict or suggest that he gets favorable treatment at City Hall.

"He's won some, he's lost some," Medaille said.

In business circles, observers say Power remains the man to see for doing business with the city.

Las Colinas manager David Brune said Power represents two partnerships that control 2,100 acres yet to be developed there.

Brune called Power a gifted attorney, although he said the political connections are not irrelevant.

Asked about a possible conflict, Brune said: "That's in the realm of his business. That's not our responsibility. And it's not Las Colinas' business."

Doan said conventional wisdom in the business community is that hiring Power is necessary to get city approval for business ventures.

Doan said he has warned city leaders about the implications of that perception — but to no avail.

"In this world, we're judged by perception," he said. "The perception is, if you want it done, you better hire Bob Power."

