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Crain's editorial:

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Out of the darkness

A sordid chapter in Ohio's political and corporate history came to a close as former Republican House Speaker Larry Householder and former state GOP chairman Matt Borges were convicted last Thursday, March 9, in federal court on racketeering-conspiracy charges.

They each face 20 years in prison for their role in what amounted to a pay-to-play bribery scheme involving Akron-based FirstEnergy Corp. The company funneled more than \$60 million through nonprofits connected to Householder and wound up with a \$1.3 billion state bailout, in the form of House Bill 6, of two failing nuclear plants.

These grand acts of deception often have mundane motivations. The government during the trial detailed how Householder in March 2017 began receiving quarterly \$250,000 payments into the bank account of Generation Now, his 501(c)(4), to help support his political goals. Turns out he also spent more than \$500,000 of dark money to pay off credit card balances, repair his Florida home and settle a business lawsuit.

Taxpayers were sold out, in part, so Householder could get right with Visa.

But what's to say this won't happen again?

The Wall Street Journal noted that prosecutors and ethics advocates "say the Ohio case illustrates the perils of undisclosed spending through nonprofits, which have multiplied after money-in-politics decisions by the Supreme Court, including in the 2010 Citizens United case."

Bruce Freed, president of the Washington, D.C.-based Center for Political Accountability, told the Journal that FirstEnergy "is the poster child of the risks

and damage a company faces from ill-considered political spending," adding, "It is a prime example of why companies need to get control over their political spending."

Maybe this episode will scare corporate interests and politicians straight. We're not optimistic.