

TRUE DIALOG.ORG

Restoring Authenticity in our Democracy

Phone (207) 774-1936
Email: info@truedialog.org

P.O. Box 171
Portland, Maine 04112

Abramoff, Norquist & Pay for Play PR

From: The Minority Staff of the U.S. Senate Committee on Finance
Investigation of Jack Abramoff's use of Tax-Exempt Organizations

Editor's Note: This excerpt taken from the 600-page report provides an example of how Spin Shops can be used to generate public relations support for lobbying.

Channel One Network

In 1999, as a coalition of opponents sought to remove Channel One from public school classrooms, Mr. Abramoff and his clients looked in part to tax-exempt organizations to provide public support for Channel One. One argument was that Channel One offered tax savings for state and federal governments. Mr. Ballabon with Channel One wrote to one of the Preston Gates lobbyists, Amy Berger, on January 12, 1999:

I think that next I want to get credit from the Pentagon public affairs dept & then from ONDCP (office of drug policy) & then from minority groups, &c &c . . . & Grover & CAGW & Rabbi Lapin . . . we should get these guys crazy! & lots & lots of interviews w/members of Congress! At least one press release every week or two

Mr. Ballabon wrote to Mr. Abramoff on January 18, 1999:

The only thing I think Paul really needs before he gets on C-SPAN on Thursday is a statement he can attribute somehow to Grover or CAGW that rebuts Molnar's charge that we are a waste of tax dollars. Can you help us get something somehow (between now and then) that Paul can refer to which argues that we are, in fact, a huge and creative tax savings?

Ms. Berger wrote to Abramoff the next day as a reminder:

Call Council Nedd and/or Tom Schatz or even Grover to get a statement hat Ch 1 is a huge and creative tax savings!!!!

Mr. Abramoff wrote to Mr. Ballabon on January 20, 1999:

I set in motion today a piece by Peter Ferrara (the chief tax counsel of ATR and former fellow of Heritage and Cato) which deals with the cost to taxpayers issue. He'll have a draft real fast for us. It'll run in the Investors Business Daily, and probably reprinted in Human Events.

Mr. Ballabon replied:

Excellent. Thanks, Jack. ALSO—tell Grover he can redeem himself by blasting the coalition in a letter to the NYT responding to today's story.

Mr. Abramoff wrote back and included Ms. Berger:

Good idea. Amy, hold on getting this to Ferrara. Let's draft something from Grover to respond to this and I'll get it to him. Have Daniel draft it up fast. I'll run it by Grover. We'll send it him and voila, it should work. Thanks Jeff.

Ten days later, Mr. Norquist published an op-ed in the *Washington Times* titled "Tuning in to Channel One."

Mr. Abramoff wrote to Mr. Ballabon on February 3, 1999, regarding providing money to ATR for a dinner series.

. . . especially in light of the huge hit Grover delivered, I think this would be a very nice gesture on your part.

On April 20, 1999, Mr. Abramoff wrote that they needed to agree on the price to pay Peter Ferrara at ATR for an economic analysis related to Channel One.

Jeff, we need to agree on the price we are going to pay him. I think he wants \$5K, but we have offered him \$3K. We can put this on our bill as a subcontract, but the firm will not want to have to pay for this out of our fees. Give me some guidance. He is, meanwhile, working on it. . . .

Ms. Berger then wrote to Mr. Abramoff:

i have offered him \$2000 and he said ok!!! I am calling right now to make the appointment.

Mr. Abramoff replied:

You're a bargain shopper! Tell him we'll give him \$3K, but we want him to do press and talk radio on this. That way I don't look like an idiot with Jeff. Wait till I tell Glen what a bargain you can drive!

Dennis Stephens (a government affairs counselor at Preston Gates) wrote to Mr. Abramoff on May 17, 1999, that "Peter with ATR is in," referring to Peter Ferrara at ATR:

When I talked with Peter this morning, he was planning to draft a press release hammering the "anti technology" crowd per Jeff B's request and will also be distributing Grover's nice piece on Channel One. A nice balance, a positive piece on the good guys and a hit piece on the bad guys. Sound good?

On May 19, 1999, ATR published a policy brief authored by Mr. Ferrara entitled “The Clear Benefits of Channel One.’ On May 20, 1999, Mr. Abramoff wrote to Mr. Norquist to say “thanks Grover” after receiving a copy of an ATR press release defending Channel One.

On April 24, 2000, ATR was included in a list of organizations to contact on Channel One:

Grover Norquist (ATR)—Damon in his office is revising K. Ring Draft letter and intends to send out this Friday . . . to all GOP senators and maybe to Dems also—

The same day, Mr. Abramoff wrote to Mr. Norquist to say a need for “a hard-hitting op-ed has arisen” regarding Channel One. Mr. Abramoff asked whether Mr. Norquist would be willing to do it himself:

Ariana Huffington has now joined Ralph Nader and George Miller in attacking Channel One. . . . We want to do an oped which smacks her big time, and also swipes at Nader’s guy and the other loonies on this. We have \$1,500 to do this piece and get it placed. Are you interested (we can write it for you)? If not, let me know if I can approach Peter [Ferrara].

Mr. Norquist published two *Washington Times* op-eds on the subject of postal increases during this time period: *Marvin Runyon: Former postmaster makes a killing*, March 31, 2000; and *Harry Potter Goes Postal*, July 25, 2000.

Mr. Norquist wrote back to Mr. Abramoff the next day:

Jack, yes, go ahead and draft a copy for me. I have just spoken with the head of the Washington Times op-ed about a piece for Bruce Heinman. They said they are full for a while due to Elian article. I will talk to Helle Wed morning and make a case for this piece. yes, ATR will do this piece and push to have it in the Washington Times and the Investors Business Daily. Also I will share it with all our state groups. Grover

-END-