

**NEWS
FROM:**

**U . S . S E N A T O R F O R K A N S A S
S E N A T E R E P U B L I C A N L E A D E R**

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W.H. TRAVEL OFFICE UPDATE

DID WHITE HOUSE APPEAL TO FBI FOR POLITICAL COVER? DOLE DEMANDS EXPLANATION OF "TRAVELGATE" FROM RENO & SESSIONS

Last week, the damage-control experts were working overtime at the White House trying to ground the "Travelgate" scandal before it took off.

But, with each passing day, new facts are emerging about the "Travelgate" affair, fueling the perception of cronyism, and fueling the skepticism of the American people.

Exhibit A: a 25-year old cousin of the President writes a memo last February to Mr. David Watkins, White House Director of Management, urging that the employees of the White House Travel Office be replaced. The cousin suggests that she should be put in charge of the travel operation. She subsequently gets the job.

Exhibit B: a major campaign contributor to the President, Worldwide Travel of Little Rock, is a former advertising client of Mr. Watkins. Worldwide is given the job of handling White House travel arrangements on a temporary basis, until public outcry forces the White House to nix this business relationship.

Exhibit C: Mr. Harry Thomason, owner of a plane charter company and good friend of the President, complains to White House officials that he and his pals in the charter business weren't getting a big enough piece of the travel-office action. He urges that travel-office employees be given their walking papers.

Exhibit D: the White House claims that an "independent audit" of the Travel Office by the Peat Marwick accounting firm exposed "gross mismanagement." It turns out that the Peat Marwick employee who conducted the audit was at the same time serving as an unpaid staff member of the Vice President's government review task force. To my knowledge, the audit has not been publicly released.

Political Cover from the FBI?

And now, we have Exhibit E: news reports suggesting that when the media spotlight started focussing too brightly on this apparent patronage scam, the White House looked to the FBI for political cover.

Although the facts are murky at best, it appears that someone within the White House approached the FBI seeking a statement that would verify White House claims of criminal wrongdoing in the Travel Office.

Guilt by Press Release

And within a few short hours of receiving the White House call, the FBI replied dutifully, issuing a press release, on Justice Department stationery, claiming there was "sufficient information for the FBI to determine that additional criminal investigation is warranted."

Now, I have enormous respect for the FBI, but this latest "guilt by press release" caper would make members of the old Soviet KGB swell with pride.

There was no opportunity for a hearing. No opportunity to review the charges and respond to them. No due process. Just haul the White House Travel Office "suspects" before 250 million Americans and smear their good reputations with an attitude of "guilty until proven innocent."

If the so-called independent audit had, in fact, uncovered criminal wrongdoing, it should have been referred to the FBI for

(more)

review and the Travel Office employees should have been informed of the charges against them...and, yes, given an opportunity to respond.

But apparently, when the White House calls these days, the FBI doesn't ask questions, doesn't check the facts, doesn't investigate. It simply jumps, and asks "how high?"

More Questions

There are more questions than answers raised by this whole tawdry affair. Who originally contacted the FBI? Was it Webster Hubbell, the roving White House ambassador at Justice? Was it the Director of the FBI himself?

And why did the FBI respond so promptly? To what extent was politics at work here? Is it the policy of the FBI to issue press releases announcing guilt, or probable guilt?

Dole Seeking Answers

We haven't gotten to the bottom of this story by a long shot. When the prosecutorial power is abused, as it appears to have been in this case, all Americans should be concerned. And that's why I am writing to Attorney General Reno and to FBI Director Sessions demanding a full explanation of last week's events.

I believed the Attorney General when she said that politics would take a back-seat in her Justice Department. But, with this latest episode in the unfolding "Travelgate" scandal, all I see is politics, the clumsy politics of a few frightened individuals whose hands were very inconveniently caught in the White House cookie jar.

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Remarks delivered on Senate floor, approximately 3:35 PM EDT.