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NEWS

U. S. SENATOR FOR KANSAS

FROM:

SENATE REPUBLICAN LEADER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Thursday, March 3, 1994

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WHITEWATER-MADISON UPDATE

Dangerous Pattern Emerging in Administration's Handling of Madison-Whitewater Affair: Don't Mix Politics & Law Enforcement

According to Webster's Dictionary, the word "independent" means, and I quote: "Not subject to control by others...Not looking to others for one's opinions or for guidance in conduct."

I cite this definition because the last time I checked, the Resolution Trust Corporation is supposed to be an independent agency...Underscore the word "independent." But, in light of recent press accounts, it appears that I may have to do some more research, or Webster's may have to revise its definition.

Last week, we learned that Roger Altman, the acting C.E.O. of the RTC and the No. 2 political appointee at the Treasury Department, met with White House political officials, allegedly to give them a "head's up" on the RTC's civil investigation into Madison Guaranty. Realizing his blunder, Mr. Altman subsequently--and very belatedly--recused himself from the Madison matter.

More Questionable Meetings

Today, we read that top officials at the Treasury Department, after the supposedly independent RTC asked the Justice Department last year to investigate possible criminal activity involving Madison, met twice with members of the White House Whitewater Brain-Trust--Bernard Nussbaum, Bruce Lindsey, and Mark Gearan. According to news accounts, the Treasury officials gave the White House staffers a report on the "status" of the RTC's investigations and informed them that President and Mrs. Clinton were "named" in the RTC referral, though not accused of any wrongdoing.

Needless to say, the average American citizen who was either named in an RTC criminal referral or the subject of an RTC civil investigation would never have received such high-level cooperation from the very people charged with conducting the investigations.

Dangerous Pattern

A dangerous pattern seems to be emerging.

During last year's Travelgate fiasco, overly-eager White House staffers raised eyebrows by pressuring a top FBI official to attend a White House "political strategy" session, allegedly to coordinate a press response to the burgeoning number of media inquiries. Unfortunately, the supposedly independent FBI went along with this charade, changing an FBI press release to suit White House political needs.

Today, White House staffers are adopting a similar ploy, saying there was nothing wrong with the Treasury-White House meetings: we are told that they were simply sessions to "coordinate responses" to press inquiries about the RTC's investigations into Madison.

Questions of Judgment & Cover-Up

Now, that brings me to another word--"judgment."

In light of the recent news reports, it's becoming increasingly clear that good judgment is in short supply among White House and top Administration officials. No doubt about it, you're asking for big, big trouble, and showing some stunningly bad judgment, when you start mixing politics with law enforcement. It's only fair to excuse a misstep or two--we all make mistakes. But when bad judgment becomes the rule, rather than the exception--and when those involved don't admit their own mistakes--then it may be time for a little White House house-cleaning.

(more)

And finally, a third word comes to mind--"cover-up." If the White House has nothing to hide about Whitewater, then why all the meetings? Why all the behind-the-scenes machinations? Why "negotiate" a subpoena to shield Whitewater documents from public scrutiny? And why put yourself in the dangerous position of being charged with compromising what are supposed to be "independent" civil and criminal investigations? Cover-up is a tough word, but the consequences of a cover-up can be even tougher.

Congress Has Responsibility - Can't Be Willing Accomplices

I don't know what to make of the recently-disclosed White House-RTC-Treasury shenanigans, but I do know that Congress has an obligation to ensure that supposedly independent law enforcement agencies are just that--independent. For Congress to punt on its oversight responsibilities is a disservice to the American people...and exposes Congress to the charge that we are willing accomplices to whatever Whitewater wrongdoing may have occurred.

FDIC Nomination on Hold Until Thorough Hearing of RTC & Madison

That's why Senator D'Amato, myself, and 41 other Senate Republicans yesterday wrote to the distinguished Majority Leader informing him that we will object to proceeding to the nomination of Ricki Tigert, President Clinton's nominee to chair the supposedly independent FDIC, unless the Senate Banking Committee has an opportunity to thoroughly examine the RTC's handling of its civil investigation into Madison. Today's shocking revelations only serve to underscore the need for such an examination...And, more broadly, for hearings on the entire Madison/Whitewater affair.

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Remarks delivered on Senate floor, approximately 12:30 PM ET.