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NEWS

U.S. SENATOR FOR KANSAS

FROM:

SENATE REPUBLICAN LEADER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
MAY 21, 1993

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W.H. TRAVEL OFFICE COUP

AMERICAN PEOPLE WANT ANSWERS TO PERCEPTION PROBLEMS & CONFLICTS;
MEMO & SO-CALLED AUDIT RAISE NEW QUESTIONS;
NO DOUBLE STANDARD IN SCRUTINY OF WHITE HOUSE CONTROVERSY

While the White House is trying to explain away President Clinton's runaway hair cut in Los Angeles, it looks like the truth is being trimmed in another hair raising controversy, this one about the White House's abrupt firing of its travel office staff.

During the past two administrations -- Republican administrations -- we heard a lot of pious statements on the floor of the Senate, and in the media, about conflicts of interest, perception problems, appearances of impropriety, and sleaze. Well, as we find out more details about this breaking news story at the White House, the American people are asking questions, and they want answers to what they see as real conflicts of interest, real perception problems, real appearances of impropriety and, possibly, some real sleaze.

Yesterday, the ranking Republican on the Appropriations Subcommittee on Treasury, Postal Service and General Government, Senator Kit Bond of Missouri, sent a letter to President Clinton raising some tough questions about the firings, and asking for a copy of the travel office audit performed by Peat Marwick. As it turns out, the letter from Senator Bond was ahead of the curve, and fully anticipated the kind of disturbing information we are hearing today.

The Cornelius Memo

There are media reports that now suggest the firings were planned as long as three months ago, as part of political coup at the non-partisan White House travel office. In a memorandum written by Catherine Cornelius, White House Assistant for Administration, David Watkins was urged to appoint Cornelius to run the travel office, replace the non-political staff in the travel office with campaign staff, and establish a joint travel agency with the Democratic National Committee. All three partisan objectives were implemented earlier this week under the guise of what the White House called "gross mismanagement" in its travel office.

The Audit: Truly Independent?

Then we were told about a Peat Marwick audit, and how it would expose all the "mismanagement". Now it turns out there are questions about the audit itself. The Peat Marwick employee who supposedly conducted the audit was at the same time serving as an unpaid staff member to the Vice President's Government Review Task Force.

I don't know all the facts, and neither do the American people. But I do know that the White House has an obligation to get all the facts out, and get them out now. At the very least, the reputations of the seven fired employees demand a fair, independent and honest review. Next, we need to know if this audit was truly independent, was it actually ongoing before all this became public?

No GOP Control of Congressional Probes

Unfortunately, Republicans are the Minority party in both the Senate and House of Representatives -- we cannot call hearings and put witnesses under oath. If this was a Republican administration, and a so-called Republican perception problem, you can bet cameras would be setting up in the hearing room right now.

If the White House won't come clean, then I urge the media to keep digging. So far, they've unearthed some interesting travel connections.