

Renzi, Doolittle, and the “DC Madam”

Capitol Hill awash in corruption and criminality

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2 May 2007

April was a not a good month for the Republican Party. Two Congressional Republicans were forced to step down from their seats on powerful House committees amidst separate corruption and influence-peddling investigations—and may eventually lose their seats in Congress or go to jail—while the head of the US Agency for International Development, Randall Tobias, resigned from his post Monday after he was named as a client of a Washington DC call girl service.

While the mainstream media treats these affairs as largely isolated, abnormal incidents, a closer look at these scandals contributes to a portrait of truly rotten political superstructure, everywhere rife with corruption, nepotism, and lawlessness. The crisis afflicting the middle layers of the Bush administration and the Republican Party reflects deepening political rifts and tensions presently wracking the entire American political establishment.

On Monday, Bush administration’s foremost opponent of prostitution, Randall Tobias, resigned after he was named as a client of an alleged DC-area prostitution service, called variously the Pamela Martin Escort Service or Pamela Martin & Associates.

He admitted that he paid for massages at his condo, but denied paying for anything more.

Tobias, the head of the Agency for International Development and former vice-chairman of AT&T, has been known to refuse foreign aid to countries that do not do enough to crack down on prostitution. In his capacity as Director of Foreign Assistance, Tobias was also known for promoting sexual abstinence, as opposed to condoms, as a means of combating HIV/AIDS.

The proprietress of the Pamela Martin service,

Deborah Jeanne Palfrey, now popularly identified in the media as the “DC Madam,” has been indicted and awaits trial. Several women have indicated that they will testify that they worked as prostitutes for Palfrey, and several men have come forward to admit to paying for sex through her organization.

Palfrey, in a curious effort to acquire defense witnesses, suddenly released to *ABC News* a list of former clients of her service that includes some 15,000 names! She assumes, perhaps correctly, that those whom she identifies will insist that the \$300 per hour services provided by her escorts were within the legal limits.

“I sure as heck am not going to federal prison for one day, let alone four to eight years, because I’m shy about bringing in the deputy secretary of whatever, not for a second,” Palfrey said following a recent court appearance. “I’ll bring every last one of them in if it’s necessary.”

One can only speculate as to who exactly is on this list, but given the somewhat nervous reaction of the press, it seems safe to assume that Tobias will not be the last to go.

According to the *ABC News*’ web site, a preliminary review of the list of clients revealed “a Bush administration economist, the head of a conservative think tank, a prominent CEO, several lobbyists, and a handful of military officials.”

“I believe there is something very, very rotten at the core of my circumstance,” observed Palfrey, standing outside the courthouse Monday.

In 2005, while on the House Natural Resources Committee, Representative Rick Renzi of Arizona concealed a \$200,000 payment he received from James

Sandlin, a former business partner, in apparent violation of House ethics rules. The fact that Renzi concealed the payment raised suspicions that it was intended as compensation for a \$4 million land deal Renzi helped close on Sandlin's behalf.

Renzi and Sandlin had jointly started a real-estate company in 2001, Fountain Realty and Development; Sandlin eventually bought Renzi's stake.

The *Wall Street Journal* reported last week that in exchange for a federal land swap deal approved by Congress, involving some of North America's largest untapped copper lodes in Arizona, Renzi asked Resolution Copper Company to buy land from Sandlin. Resolution Copper refused to take part in the deal.

When Petrified Forest group offered to buy Sandlin's property for \$4 million—4 times what Sandlin paid for it in 2003—Renzi dropped his support for the land swap deal with Resolution Copper.

On April 25, the *Wall Street Journal* revealed that in the run-up to the November 2006 elections, US Attorney Paul K. Charlton was contacted by Renzi's chief of staff, Brian Murray, who asked about a US probe into the land deal. Charlton considered this improper, and subsequently contacted the Justice Department.

Charlton was among the eight federal prosecutors fired six weeks later.

Renzi has denied that he will resign, even as both the Republican and Democratic parties are lining up candidates to run in a special election should his seat be vacated. Renzi did, however, resign from all three of his committee posts, which included seats on the powerful House Intelligence Committee, the House Natural Resources Committee and the House Financial Services Committee.

The ongoing investigations into the activities of Washington lobbyist Jack Abramoff are revealing an elaborate web of influence-peddling, bribery, and corruption involving far-right Christian and Zionist allies of the Republican Party, and have already resulted in criminal convictions for two Republican representatives—Randy “Duke” Cunningham of California and Bob Ney of Ohio—as well as Abramoff himself, who is now cooperating with federal prosecutors.

California Representative John Doolittle is currently under scrutiny for inserting a total of \$37 million into

various defense spending bills while he was on the House Appropriations Committee that went to a firm associated with Brent Wilkes, a Pentagon contractor who is accused of providing cash, perks, and incentives to Cunningham.

Doolittle has also admitted that now-incarcerated Jack Abramoff was a “friend” who donated to his campaigns and shared his skybox at a Washington DC sports stadium.

John Doolittle's wife Julie runs a political consulting company out of the family's California mansion called Sierra Dominion Financial Solutions, Incorporated, which received more than \$60,000 in business from Abramoff between 2002 and 2004. Filing cabinets and computers associated with this company were seized in this month's FBI raid.

At one fundraiser for Doolittle, at which President Bush spoke, Mrs. Doolittle was paid a 15 percent commission on the funds raised, or \$90,000.

The House Appropriations Committee from which Doolittle resigned is one of the most powerful committees on Capitol Hill, responsible for appropriating revenue and allocating resources to the various government departments. The recent emergency war supplemental funding bill Bush is expected to veto today, for instance, was approved by the Appropriations Committee on March 16.

Mark Zachares, a prominent official in the Northern Mariana Islands, was also recently charged in the Abramoff case. He is charged with using his influence to ensure the profitability of Abramoff's businesses as well as those of his clients and allies in Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands. In return, he received a \$10,000 golf trip to St Andrews in Scotland as well as a call to Karl Rove's office recommending him for a position in the Department of the Interior.



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