

A Traveling Partnership

The shadow partners Ralph Reed, Jack Abramoff, and Grover Norquist, have now been dragged into the news with Tom DeLay, as the FBI, a Federal grand jury, and U.S. Senate investigators probe looting of Indian tribes, fraud, and money-laundering.

Several trips abroad by the operatives and DeLay are under scrutiny, as small leads into a huge, tangled web:

May 2000 Trip

Tom DeLay had a week-long golfing vacation in Scotland arranged by **Jack Abramoff**, which was paid for by the casino-owning Choctaw Indians of Mississippi, and the Internet gambling firm E-Lottery, whose funds were funnelled through the National Center for Public Policy Research (NCPFR), a lobbying center for Indian casinos and Social Security privatization, with Abramoff on its board.

Two months after the trip, DeLay broke with other House Republicans and killed a Republican bill that would have outlawed on-line gambling such as Internet casinos. Online gambling interests fought the bill through their Internet Gaming Council, whose strategist and paid consultant was **Grover Norquist**, operating through his lobbying firm, Janus-Merritt. The world's biggest online casino company, Abramoff's client, Israeli-owned Casava Enterprises based in Gibraltar, reportedly contributed \$1.5 million to NCPFR in 2003.

August 2002 Trip

Abramoff, former DeLay aide **Michael Scanlon**, religion-manager **Ralph Reed**, Rep. **Robert Ney** (R-Ohio), and U.S. government procurement official **David Safavian** took a lavish golfing vacation to Scotland. The trip was sponsored by the NCPFR and Abramoff's private charity, the Capital Athletic Foundation, with money taken from Indian tribes.

Abramoff and his lobbying partner Scanlon are currently under investigation on allegations of looting over \$60 million in fees and contributions from Indian tribes who owned gambling casinos. Representative Ney, the House Administration Committee chairman, was at the time of the trip working on a bold scheme by Abramoff. The Texas Tigua tribe's El Paso casino was closed down by state government action, because of an "anti-gambling" crusade secretly organized by Abramoff, and paid for by rival casinos and run publicly through Reed and his Christian Coalition networks. Then Abramoff arranged for the Tiguas to pay him and Scanlon millions to campaign to reopen the casino. Ney met with the Tiguas soon after the

Scotland trip, promising to amend his national election-reform bill to override the closing of that Texas casino. Ney didn't deliver, and the casino remains closed. (Ney had previously used his Congressional position to help Abramoff and Scanlon to take over the casino cruise line SunCruz, pressuring the line's owner, Gus Boulis, to sell out to Abramoff. Boulis was soon murdered, gangland-style.)

Abramoff's old friend Safavian, as Norquist's partner at Janus-Merritt, had been the registered lobbyist for the Interactive Gaming Council and the National Indian Gaming Association. In November 2004, President Bush appointed Safavian head of the Office of Federal Procurement Policy; he is supposed to see that scandals over military and other competitive sourcing are quieted.

At the 2004 Republican Convention, Reed confessed that he had taken millions of dollars from Indian casino owners in Abramoff's schemes in several states, and that he had passed out great sums to state-level Christian Coalition groups to campaign against gambling interests rivaling the casinos paying Reed.

The Alabama Christian Coalition immediately issued an open letter (Sept. 30, 2004) defending the long close relationship of their leaders to Reed, and quoting from Reed that he had no "direct knowledge" about his partner Abramoff's clients. The relevant issue appears to be Abramoff's victims, the Choctaws of Mississippi, who want to block gambling competition across the state border in Alabama.

Both houses of the Alabama state legislature have now passed versions of a bill that would compel groups such as the Christian Coalition, which buy advertising designed to influence legislation, such as that on gambling regulation, to disclose the source of their funds. A similar Alabama bill last year was killed by a filibuster by Christian Coalition allies. They are filibustering the present bill, astonishingly enough, while simultaneously demanding the elimination of the right to filibuster in the U.S. Congress, in aid of their attack on the judiciary.

August 2003 Trip

Rep. Tom Feeney (R-Fla.) reported that Abramoff's NCPFR paid for Feeney's Scottish golfing jaunt with Abramoff and with Reed. It had just been announced the previous month that Reed would be chairman of the 2004 Bush-Cheney campaign for the southeastern United States; later Feeney would help out by promoting touch-screen voting programs for use in the 2004 election. A few weeks after the August 2003 trip, headlines began spotlighting the disappearance of millions from Indian casino owners tribal accounts into the lobbyist scams, and the Abramoff-Reed-Norquist-DeLay fabric began unravelling.