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Is Pete Sessions Caught in Abramoff Bribery Scandal?

Sessions May Have Traded Official Acts for Foreign Trips and Contributions

An analysis of recent press accounts and public documents raises serious questions regarding whether a number of Congressman Pete Sessions' (R – Dallas) official acts were connected to an all-expense paid trip to exotic Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and to the receipt of thousands of dollars in political contributions provided by Indian casino clients of Washington lobbyist and admitted felon, Jack Abramoff.

Pete Sessions may well be involved in an exchange of official acts in return for personal benefits and campaign contributions. While Sessions showed little to no interest in Malaysia or tribal gaming **before** his trip to Malaysia and the receipt of contributions from Abramoff clients, **since then** Sessions has taken direct official action to assist Malaysia and the Indian tribes Abramoff represented.

Violation One:

Sessions' lavish trip to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, arranged by Jack Abramoff and Michael Scanlon, (both have pled guilty to felony bribery charges) was followed by direct support for, and assistance to, Malaysia.

The highly respected nonpartisan political publication The National Journal reported that Scanlon and Abramoff worked on behalf of Malaysia through a sham organization called the American International Center (AIC). According to The National Journal, AIC was formed to "avoid disclosure" in light of Malaysia's reputation for anti-Semitism and human rights violations. (*Source: The National Journal, April 4, 2004*)

The National Journal also reported, "The work for the Malaysians included at least one congressional trip in January 2002, when Reps. **Pete Sessions**...visited Kuala Lumpur on a fact finding mission involving terrorism and trade issues. Two members of Greenberg Traurig [Abramoff's firm] were also on the trip." (*Source: The National Journal, March 27, 2004*) Following the January 2002 trip, Sessions became one of Malaysia's most active supporters in Congress.

What did Sessions get?

- 9 day, all-expense paid trip to Kuala Lumpur (*Source: Congressional Travel Records*)

- Trip valued at \$10,500 dollars (*Source: Congressional Travel Records*)
- The trip was arranged and funded with the help of Abramoff and Scanlon. (*Source: The National Journal, March 27, 2004*) Abramoff associate and former DeLay aide Tony Rudy accompanied Sessions on the trip. Rudy is identified as “staffer A” in the Abramoff indictment. (*Source: The National Journal, December 12, 2005; The Houston Chronicle January 8, 2006*)

Official Acts by Sessions:

- Founded the “Malaysia Trade, Security and Economic Cooperation Caucus in the House of Representatives” (*Source: Malaysia General News, April 16, 2002*)
- Hosted a welcome reception in the House of Representatives for the Prime Minister of Malaysia on May 26, 2004 (*Source: Sessions’ Dear Colleague Letter, May 19, 2004*)
- Pressured immigration officials to expedite the process for Malaysians seeking Visas (*Source: New Straits Times, September 24, 2002*)
- Co-sponsored H.RES.174 congratulating the people of Malaysia and honoring the appointment of the first female Chief Judge of Malaya, Malaysia (*Source: Congressional Record Public Bills and Resolutions March 17, 2005*)

Violation Two:

Pete Sessions also received thousands of dollars from Indian gaming clients of Jack Abramoff after signing official letters to assist Indian tribes who were working to block competing tribes from opening casinos:

Official Acts by Sessions:

- Cosigned letter to then Attorney General John Ashcroft, along with Tom DeLay, “to pressure the Bush administration into shutting down an Indian-owned casino that lobbyist Jack Abramoff wanted closed,” on December 11, 2001 (*Source: The Associated Press, January 10, 2006*)
- Signed letters to Interior Secretary Gale Norton on February 27, 2002, opposing the building of Indian casinos in Louisiana, asserting that, “the societal damage caused by gambling outweighs any purported benefits”(*Source: The Dallas Morning News, January 6, 2006*)

What did Sessions get?

- \$6,500 in total campaign contributions from Abramoff’s tribal clients within just three months of signing the 2001 letter (*Source: The Associated Press, January 10, 2006*)
- \$20,500 in total campaign contributions from Abramoff’s tribal clients between 2002-2004 (*Source: The Dallas Morning News, January 6, 2006*)

The Law:

Given Sessions' work on behalf of Jack Abramoff, it is useful to review the Federal Statute covering bribery of public officials. The statute reads:

18 U.S.C. § 201(b)(2)(A)

§ 201. Bribery of public officials and witnesses

(b) Whoever—(2) being a public official or person selected to be a public official, directly or indirectly, corruptly demands, seeks, receives, accepts, or agrees to receive or accept anything of value personally or for any other person or entity, in return for: (A) being influenced in the performance of any official act;

-shall be fined under this title or not more than three times the monetary equivalent of the thing of value, whichever is greater, or imprisoned for not more than fifteen years, or both, and may be disqualified from holding any office of honor, trust, or profit under the United States. (*Source: United States Code, <http://uscode.house.gov/>*)

Conclusion: In light of the ongoing investigations into Abramoff and other associates, the highly questionable activity by Pete Sessions is unethical at best and illegal at worse. Clearly, media scrutiny of Sessions' activities is warranted, and no one should be surprised if Pete Sessions is one of the members of Congress being investigated by federal law enforcement officials.

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