

**THE BLOG**

Pundit Payola, Continued

By Marty Kaplan

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Move over, Armstrong Williams. Step aside, Maggie Gallagher. The gasbags-for-rent business has just gotten more competitive.

BusinessWeek Online has broken the story that Doug Bandow, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute who's also a syndicated columnist for the Copley News Service, has been on the take for years. His columns, which have appeared in hundreds of newspapers, as well as his television appearances, have lent the aura of an expert's independence, as well as the libertarian Cato Institute prestige, such as it is, all the while he was being paid up to two grand a pop for laundering lobbyists' propaganda.

Who paid him? Have a look at some of the smoke he blew up the media's ass, and see if you can guess:

He gave the Cato seal of approval to the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, whose notorious sweatshop industry turned imported Asian women into indentured servants and whose corrupt immigration system forced hundreds into the sex trade.

He gave some libertarian lovin' to the Mississippi Choctaws, for their entrepreneurial spirit, hard work, and commitment to free enterprise. You know, the tribe whose Washington lobbyists spent millions to fund phony Christian anti-gambling phone banks in order to thwart a rival tribe's casino business.

That's right — it's Casino Jack Abramoff himself who rented Doug Bandow's access to "free media" and his Cato credibility in order to shill for his clients.

Cato's flack, shocked to discover there was gambling in his own casino, called Bandow's behavior "inappropriate," and Bandow, resigning, called his behavior a "lapse in judgment."

But Peter Ferrara's not resigning, or even eating crow. Ferrara, a senior policy adviser at the Institute for Policy Innovation, another Republican talking points machine posing as a think tank, took time out from shilling for Bush's demolition of Social Security in order to pimp for the Choctaws and the Marianas, courtesy of Abramoff. "I do that all the time," Ferrara told BusinessWeek. "I've done that in the past, and I'll do it in the future."

And Tom Giovanetti, the president of the Institute for Policy Innovation, unlike his Cato cousins, saw no reason to seem to be appalled by pundit payola: “If somebody pinned me down and said, ‘Do you think this is wrong or unethical?’ I’d say no.” Critics, he said, are applying a “naive purity standard... I have a sense that there are a lot of people at think tanks who have similar arrangements.”

I’m sure he’s right. Lobbyists and ideologues use every trick in the book in order to spread propaganda. But why do editors, bookers and producers have to fall for it? Maybe it’s because asking an “expert” columnist or guest whether a lobbyist or special interest group paid them isn’t enough of a test. After all, the payrolls of these Disinformation Institutes are no more pure than Jack Abramoff’s bribes.

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