

CREW asks for investigation into Presidential Records Act violations

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

U.S. Attorney Firings and Abramoff-Related Emails Sent from RNC and Other Outside Addresses Circumvent Mandatory Record-Keeping System

WASHINGTON - In light of e-mails released by the House Judiciary Committee this week in response to the on- going U.S. Attorney firing scandal, Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW) sent a letter today to Chairman of the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, Rep. Henry Waxman (D-CA), asking for an investigation into whether the White House has violated its mandatory record- keeping obligation under the Presidential Records Act (PRA).

One email, sent to Justice Department Chief of Staff D. Kyle Sampson from J. Scott Jennings, White House Deputy Political Director, uses an email account, SJennings@gwb43.com, on a server owned by the Republican National Committee. This raises serious questions about whether the White House was trying to deliberately evade its responsibilities under the PRA, which directs the president to take all necessary steps to maintain presidential records to provide a full accounting of all activities during his tenure.

A number of other emails from Deputy Chief of Staff Karl Rove's former assistant Susan Ralston to convicted lobbyist Jack Abramoff document Ms. Ralston's use of three outside domains: rnhq.com (used for the headquarters of the Republican National Committee), georgebush.com and aol.com. In many of these emails Ms. Ralston is communicating inside White House information to Mr. Abramoff in response to Mr. Abramoff's efforts to broker deals for his clients and place specified individuals in positions within the administration.

CREW has learned that to fulfill its statutory obligations under the PRA, the White House email system automatically copies all messages created by staff and sends them to the White House Office of Records Management for archiving. It appears that the White House deliberately bypassed the automatic archiving function of its own email system that was designed to ensure compliance with the PRA.

CREW currently is involved in several lawsuits challenging other improper and illegal record keeping practices of the Bush administration. In this matter, CREW cannot bring a lawsuit challenging the White

House on its compliance with the PRA because of a legal precedent that relies on presidents to honor the mandatory record-keeping practices, with no judicial review.

Melanie Sloan, executive director of CREW, said today, "Now that we know that at least two White House officials have circumvented the law by using alternate email systems to discuss the U.S. Attorney firings and Jack Abramoff, we are asking Chairman Waxman to investigate whether the White House has continually violated its mandatory record-keeping obligation under the Presidential Records Act. This administration continues to disregard the law in favor of agenda-driven politics."

CREW asks for investigation into Presidential Records Act violations by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources