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Sent: Monday, August 16, 2010 5:28 AM
Subject: Scathing Congress report slams Obama's 'covert, criminal activity'
WORLDNETDAILY EXCLUSIVE

OBAMA WATCH CENTRAL

Scathing Congress report slams Obama's 'covert, criminal activity'

President charged with illegally using taxpayer money to manipulate public

Posted: August 16, 2010
12:01 am Eastern

By Jerome R. Corsi
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Rep. Darrell Issa, R-Calif., the ranking Republican on the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, issued a scathing staff report today charging that the White House has "used the machinery of the Obama campaign to tout the president's agenda through inappropriate and sometimes unlawful public relations and propaganda initiatives."

[An advance pre-publication copy of the report](#), shared by Issa's Washington office with WND, accuses the White House of nothing short of criminal activity. It charges the Obama administration with violating federal laws to advance what the Government Accounting Office has characterized as an unlawful "covert campaign," using federal resources "to activate a sophisticated propaganda and lobbying campaign."



Rep. Darrell Issa, R-Calif.

Pulling no punches, the Oversight Republican Report accuses the Obama White House of "violating federal law prohibiting the use of appropriated

funds for publicity or propaganda purposes."

"The White house has failed to transition from campaign mode to leadership mode and is now inappropriately leveraging those campaign-trail relationships to unlawfully generate support for the president's agenda," the report concludes.

Read in its entirety, the Oversight Republican Report charges the Obama administration with the type of callous, unethical and possibly criminal manipulation of public opinion that is reminiscent of Watergate and the illegal campaign activities engineered by Donald Segretti on behalf of the Committee to Re-Elect the President during Richard Nixon's presidential election campaign of 1972.

In 1964, Donald Segretti pleaded guilty to three misdemeanor counts of distributing illegal campaign materials, for which he served in federal prison four months of a six-month term.

The Obama administration's abuses alleged in the Oversight Republican Report can be summed up under the term "astro-turfing," a fraudulent public relations activity in which "the White House and the agency whose resources it is co-opting attempt to create the impression that grassroots support for a particular policy exists when in fact it has been fabricated using taxpayer dollars."

The report points to several instances of alleged, unlawful abuses:

The National Endowment for the Arts

On Aug. 6, 2009, on behalf of the White House Office of Public Engagement, NEA Director Yosi Sargent invited a group of artists, producers, promoters, organizers, marketers and other influencers of the arts to participate in a conference call designed to encourage involvement in President Obama's United We Serve program.

Nell Abernathy, director of outreach for United We Serve and Buffy Wicks, deputy director of the White House Office of Public Engagement, identified the goal of the NEA program was to recruit artists to create art to support the president's agenda "with the same enthusiasm and with the same energy that we all saw in each other during the campaign."

The Oversight Republican Report, however, contends the initiative was illegal.

"The use of taxpayer dollars and federal employees to create an alliance whereby the NEA becomes the de facto strategic communications arm of the White House is unlawful," the report alleges. "Using a government e-mail account and government personnel and resources to host a call using artists and arts group to

support the president's agenda is a clear violation of federal law."

The report stresses that it was inappropriate for representatives of the White House and the NEA to formerly ask artists and entertainers to use their talents to support the president's agenda "because many of these people rely on NEA grants to subsidize their livelihoods."

The Department of Justice

In October 2008, the Justice Department's Office of Public Affairs added Tracy Russo, the chief blogger and deputy director for online communications for Sen. John Edwards' presidential campaign, to direct the Department's "new media efforts."

The Oversight Republican Report documents that Russo covertly attempted to shape public opinion by posting comments on the Internet anonymously, or through the use of a pseudonym, attacking authors or contents viewed as critical of the president, in an effort to shape debate online.

The report concludes, "The deployment of Justice Department resources to generate clandestine comments on message boards and blogs is a highly improper use of the Department's resources."

The report cites GAO rulings stating that covert propaganda violates Title 5 U.S.C. Section 3107 of federal law, which prohibits the use of publicity experts unless specifically appropriated for that purpose.

Office of Education

The Oversight Republican Report details that beginning on the morning of April 24, 2009, U.S. Department of Education Deputy Assistant Secretary for External Affairs and Outreach Massie Ritsch launched an e-mail campaign in coordination with the White House to promote President Obama's plan to begin a federal takeover of student loans.

The report again charges criminal abuses: "The intent of the e-mail is clearly to create grassroots support for the president's education agenda by inappropriately leveraging Ritsch's position as a Department of Education employee. Because it was drafted or intended to influence members of Congress while they consider the president's federal student loan plan, it is unlawful."

Federal workforce

The Oversight Republican Report charges that in March 2010, White House Office for Health Reform Director Nancy-Ann DeParle sent "overtly partisan, unsolicited

health-reform e-mails to career civil servants in executive branch offices, suggesting to recipients that they were being officially instructed by the White House to support the president's health-care reform proposals."

Again, the report charges the Obama White House with illegal activity: "Criminal statutes prohibit executive branch officials from using appropriated funds to influence the legislative process. Title 18 of the United States Code, section 1913, prohibits federal employees from engaging in the very activities DeParle urges."

Department of Health and Human Resources

The Oversight Republican Report charges that the Department of Health and Human Resources contracted with Jonathan Gruber, a health-care economist from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, to provide "technical assistance" to support President Obama's health care reform proposals.

For this, Gruber was paid \$297,600, plus another \$95,000 for a second HHS job.

The Obama administration then relied upon and distributed Gruber's commentary and views to publications including Time, The Washington Post, the New York Times and the New Republic without revealing that Gruber was a paid HHS consultant.

"Using HHS appropriations to contract a highly visible health-care expert to advocate on behalf of administration policies under the guise of providing 'technical assistance' is inappropriate," the Oversight Republican Report concludes, while further alleging that the administration's failure to disclose Gruber's status while touting his work violates GAO's policy prohibiting covert propaganda.

Other abuses

Among the additional abuses, the Oversight Republican Report cites a cable television ad featuring 84-year-old Andy Griffith promoting Medicare and the Obama administration's health-care reform bill.

The Department of Health and Human Services paid \$700,000 to make the cable television ad buy, and the report alleges the commercial - run in July 2010 - gave the appearance that it was "designed to affect general elections by convincing seniors to support one of the Democrat's major legislative initiatives."

The report further charges the White House of posting "fictitious and misleading" information about jobs "saved and created" on the White House-maintained website Recovery.gov.

Also criticized are signs the Federal Highway Administration has encouraged the states to post, announcing that new federal highway projects were being funded by stimulus dollars.

Axelrod and astro-turfing

The practice of using covert propaganda to push political opinion is familiar to at least one administration official, Obama Senior Advisor David Axelrod.



David Axelrod

Prior to joining then-Sen. Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign, Axelrod was a partner in AKP&D Message & Media, a Chicago-based media and public relations firm that listed among its corporate clients Cablevision and AT&T.

According to [a Business Week report published in 2008](#), AKP&D set up front organizations for corporations that wanted to run public issue ads without having the ads identified as having been paid for by the corporations.

Business Week cited as an example a television commercial Axelrod's firm created for Commonwealth Edison, the largest electric utility in Illinois. The ad warned a ComEd bankruptcy and blackouts could occur unless a rate hike was approved. The ad was sponsored by CORE, which described itself as "a coalition of individuals, businesses and organizations."

After a complaint was filed with state regulators, ComEd was forced to admit it had bankrolled the entire \$15-million effort.