

WHICH MASTER DO THESE RENT-A- GENERALS SERVE?

Finally, Ike Skelton has broken the thick silence surrounding Sunday's exposure of the Pentagon's Rent-A-General program.

Mr. Speaker, last Sunday, the front page of the New York Times included a story about the efforts of the Pentagon's public affairs operation to influence retired military officers now working as military analysts for some of our nation's largest media organizations.

I am very angry about the issues raised by the New York Times' story, **as are many of my colleagues who have called me aside to discuss it.** The story does not reflect well on the Pentagon, on the military analysts in question, or on the media organizations that employ them.

Mr. Speaker, maybe I am too idealistic, but this story is appalling to me on a number of levels. For me, it all comes down to trust and credibility. **And it would be a dangerous thing for the American people to lose trust in the Pentagon, in our retired officer corps, and in the press, each of which has a critical role to play in preserving our nation's freedoms.**

Through the years, I have frequently urged our military services to improve their efforts to tell America about the good work that is being done by our country's sons and daughters in uniform. Our military services have an important story to tell, and public affairs offices are critical to that task. But credibility is paramount. Once lost, it

is difficult or impossible to regain.

There is nothing inherently wrong with providing information to the public and the press. But there is a problem if the Pentagon is providing special access to retired officers and then **basically using them as pawns to spout the Administration's talking points of the day**. There are allegations that analysts who failed to deliver the message required by the Administration mysteriously lost access to future briefings and information. I find this deeply troubling. We deserve to be able to trust the actions of the Pentagon.

We also deserve a retired officer corps that is worthy of the respect it receives from the American people, who place great faith in their judgment and loyalty to our nation. Americans trust our active duty and retired military, and rightly so.

I know a number of the retired officers employed by the media as military analysts to be honorable people. But the special access they are alleged to have received and the circumstances of their employment, without proper disclosure of their outside interests or biases, raise a number of uncomfortable questions that deserve serious answers.

Which master do these analysts serve?

The United States Government, which supplies their retirement pay?

The Pentagon, which may reduce the amount of analysis they actually need to do by providing detailed talking points promoting the current administration's message agenda?

The defense contractors, who pay them for serving on boards or for their defense expertise, and perhaps more to

the point, for their Pentagon connections?

Will their analysis, either by design or just by lucky coincidence, result in contracts or other advantages for the companies from which they take home a paycheck?

It hurts me to my core to think that there are those from the ranks of our retired officers who have decided to cash in and essentially prostitute themselves on the basis of their previous positions within the Department of Defense. I would hate to think that because a few people have blurred ethical boundaries and cashed in on their former positions that we might tarnish the military's hard won reputation for professionalism and objectivity and love of country first and foremost.

Finally, I think our media have a serious responsibility to disclose potential conflicts of interest when they do their reporting. This applies to all of their stories, of course, and not just those that include retired officer military analysts. I understand that different organizations have different rules, but perhaps it would not be out of order for our journalism schools and professional journalism organizations to develop ethical guidelines for dealing with such issues.

Mr. Speaker, our nation's military exists to protect America's freedoms for citizens today and for future generations. The First Amendment guarantees the right of all Americans, including retired service members and members of the press, to speak freely and without restraint. **But with our rights come responsibilities to act honestly and ethically.** I have no doubt

we will continue to discuss these matters in the days ahead.

Please call Skelton, (202) 225-2876, and thank him for condemning the program. You might suggest that an inquiry into the program would go some way to restoring the credibility of the military's senior retirees. I also invite you to call Carl Levin, Senate Armed Forces Chair, (202) 224-6221, to invite him to join his counterpart in the House in condemning the Rent-A-General program.

Skelton spoke of "discussing these matters in the day ahead." If Skelton (and hopefully Levin with him) treat this threat to the credibility of the military seriously, we might actually get people to begin to report on the Influence Industry in Washington.