

# YOU CAN'T CLEAN THE STENCH OUT OF THE STRAIGHT TALK FOR LOBBYISTS EXPRESS

The WaPo placed the news that Tom Loeffler, McCain's Fundraising Chair, has left the campaign because he was unwilling to give up his lobbying gig, on A1.

Tom Loeffler, the national finance co-chairman for Sen. John McCain's presidential campaign, resigned yesterday because of his lobbying ties, a campaign adviser said.

With five high-level resignations in the last week or so and the prominence of coverage about those departures, you might think McCain is really cleaning house.

But here's the thing. Even with just the resignations of the last ten days, McCain has shown a real inconsistency about what kind of lobbying ties compromise his campaign. With Loeffler and Eric Burgeson, there seem to have been two problems. First, both were **active** lobbyists, who lobbied the Senate for clients whose issues fell squarely in the purview of the Commerce, Armed Services, and Indian Affairs Committees on which McCain serves. In addition, both represented foreign "countries," Loeffler Saudi Arabia and Burgeson the Kurds.



Of course, that's true of Charlie Black, as well. For example, Black lobbied the Senate on FISA, and has had an affinity for representing evil dictators throughout his career. So why is okay for Charlie Black to stick around while Loeffler and Burgeson take their blackberries and go home?

John McCain has a ready explanation: Charlie Black (and Rick Davis, someone else McCain couldn't afford to lose) aren't really lobbyists anymore:

Charlie Black and Rick Davis are not in the lobbying business; they've been out of that business,

Today's WaPo story provides a little more detail about what that really means.

Until recently, his top political adviser, Charles R. Black Jr., was the head of a Washington lobbying firm. Black retired in March from BKSH & Associates, the firm he helped found, to stay with the campaign. Davis ran a lobbying firm for several years but has said he is on leave from it.

Indeed, Black **does** seem to have stepped down from his lobbying work sometime before the quarterly disclosure forms were submitted starting on April 18. So by "out of the business," McCain must mean "out of the business for a whopping month and a half." But there are two problems still.

First, how do you wipe clean all the lobbying Charlie Black did from the Straight Talk for Lobbyists Express? Black was, by his own admission, lobbying from McCain's campaign bus.

Black said he does a lot of his work by telephone from McCain's Straight Talk Express bus.

How do you separate either the policies McCain espoused because Charlie Black—lobbyist for AT&T—or Eric Burgeson—lobbyist for liquid coal and nuclear energy—or Tom Loeffler—lobbyist for Saudi Arabia—advised him to adopt those policies? And how do you dissociate McCain's primary victory from the work these folks did? It sure seems like McCain's primary victory is,

and will always be, tainted by Mr. AT&T, Mr. Nuclear Energy, and Mr. Saudi Arabia.

So the next time you hear McCain spouting his "green" images, ask him if Eric Burgeson's clients bought that green image for him.

Finally, there is one even greater inconsistency in McCain's new vetting policy (aside from the fact that his wife escapes all notice). Doug Goodyear and Doug Davenport resigned from McCain's campaign because they had lobbied for the military junta in Myanmar **six years ago**.

"It was our only foreign representation, it was for a short tenure, and it was six years ago," Goodyear told NEWSWEEK, adding the junta's record in the current cyclone crisis is "reprehensible."

So the McCain campaign has already accepted that the taint of questionable lobbying deals lasts at least six years. That would make Charlie Black's representation of Ahmad Chalabi, just to take one example, fair game. You know—the guy who, more than any other, has ensured the Iraq invasion benefited Iran?

Obviously, with all the inconsistencies of ousting Eric Burgeson but keeping top campaign aides Davis and Black (and shielding Cindy's investments from scrutiny), this so-called vetting process is just one big whitewash—which the McCain campaign readily admits.

"The campaign over the last week or so obviously had a **perception problem** with regards with this whole business of lobbyists and their work," spokesman Brian Rogers said. "This is really all about setting a policy so that we can just get through that **perception problem** and the issues that come up with regards to lobbyists affiliated with the campaign and move on." [my emphasis]

The McCain campaign employed a number of people

who were actively lobbying the Senate on subjects central to McCain's interests. That's not a perception problem, it's a real ethical problem, a stench the campaign can't cleanse simply by considering it a "perception problem." McCain's campaign and McCain's policies have been bought and sold by lobbyists, something that doesn't appear to be changing anytime soon.