

THE WAPO'S BROCCOLI SOUP

I'm not so much surprised that Marcus Brauchli has had to admit that he knew the Pay2Play Salons were off the record.

Washington Post executive editor Marcus Brauchli says he knew more about the controversial "salons" the paper had planned than previously has been reported, including the fact that they were being billed as "off-the-record" to potential sponsors.

Brauchli made the acknowledgement in a letter to Charles Pelton, the person hired by the Post to organize what was to have been a series of corporate-sponsored, off-the-record dinners at the home of publisher Katharine Weymouth. Pelton, who resigned from the paper in September, told the Post's ombudsman the day that POLITICO reported on the salons that Brauchli and other editors had been involved in discussions of them and that the plans had "been well developed in the newsroom."

[snip]

But in a Sept. 25 letter to Pelton, obtained by POLITICO, Brauchli said he "knew that the salon dinners were being promoted as 'off the record.' That fact was never hidden from me by you or anyone else." And he also acknowledged that he had seen two slide shows on the dinners and received e-mailed copies of the promotional materials for them.

After all, back when the WaPo started to 'fess up to the fact that "senior managers" knew the details of the Pay2Pay salons, they made it clear those same managers knew they were off the record.

But while Post executives immediately disowned the flier's characterization, senior managers had already approved major details of the first dinner. They had agreed, for example, that the dinner would include the participation of Brauchli and at least one Post reporter, that the event would be off the record, that it would feature a wide-ranging guest list of people involved in reforming health care, and that it would have sponsorship.

I always assumed when the WaPo said "senior managers," that probably included the Executive Editor.

But I am interested in a few details. First, Greg Mitchell makes it clear that the Brauchli letter was given to other journalists by the lawyer of Charles Pelton—who Katharine Weymouth and Brauchli tried to scapegoat for the scandal.

However, in a subsequent letter to Mr. Pelton – which was sent to The Times by Mr. Pelton's lawyer – Mr. Brauchli now says that he did indeed know that the dinners were being promoted as 'off the record,' and that he and Mr. Pelton had discussed that issue."

With that in mind, consider the two investigations the WaPo put together to understand how the WaPo came to sell its editorial line. First, an investigation by the WaPo's General Counsel.

Weymouth yesterday appointed the newspaper's general counsel, Eric Lieberman, to review the discussions that led to the controversy.

Much, much more interesting, however, is that the WaPo appointed Brauchli to conduct an investigation.

The review, along with a parallel inquiry by Executive Editor Marcus Brauchli and Senior Editor Milton Coleman, is aimed at avoiding another episode that could damage the paper's reputation.

So Marcus Brauchli, who knew all the details of this, conducted an investigation to find out how it happened. Perhaps pursuant to that, Pelton left the WaPo. And now Pelton is using the NYT and Politico to make sure that Brauchli doesn't get to blame Pelton in his whitewash.