



---

# THE PLAIN DEALER

## Democrats target Ney in wake of GOP scandals

Sunday, October 02, 2005

**Sabrina Eaton**  
Plain Dealer Bureau

Washington – A series of criminal charges filed against Rep. Bob Ney's Washington friends have made the Ohio GOP congressman's enemies hope he will be the next political casualty of Capitol Hill scandals.

Although the five-term congressman from Heath, in Licking County, says he has done nothing wrong, watchdog groups that monitor Congress say Ney's assistance to Washington lobbyist Jack Abramoff may have run afoul of the law or congressional ethics rules.

Abramoff, who has known Ney since their days as college Republicans, also had close ties to House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, Republican of Texas, who was indicted last week on charges of campaign finance irregularities in Texas.

"After Mr. DeLay, Bob Ney has the most serious ethics problems in Congress," says Melanie Sloan, a former Democratic staffer who is executive director of Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington. The House Ethics Committee rebuked DeLay last year for objectionable fund-raising practices and improper use of government resources after a Democratic congressman submitted a complaint written by Sloan's group.

Commenting on the incidents that are the focus of his critics, Ney said he was victimized by former friends who lied to him. Although his office did not respond to repeated requests for comment for this story, Ney said in a past interview that he felt "duped" and said his interactions with Abramoff did not violate any laws or ethical rules.

"I know it doesn't look good," he said, adding that he "had all the best intentions."

Ney said he regretted helping Abramoff and his business associate, Adam Kidan, who now face fraud charges in Florida.

They are accused of using a fake wire transfer to defraud lenders out of roughly \$60 million to buy a casino boat line called SunCruz. They recently pleaded not guilty.

When the pair were trying to buy the casino boats from Florida businessman Gus Boulis in early 2000, Ney

entered a statement in the Congressional Record that criticized Boulis' ethical practices. A few months later, he issued another official statement that praised Kidan's "renowned reputation for honesty and integrity." Kidan and Abramoff both contributed to Ney's 2000 re-election campaign, although Ney refunded \$2,000 to Kidan this May, before he was indicted, citing discovery of Kidan's past woes.

The Miami Herald reported last weekend that federal authorities in Florida are investigating whether Ney improperly influenced the casino deal by exerting pressure on Boulis. A spokeswoman for the U.S. attorney's office in Florida declined to comment.

On Tuesday, authorities in Florida charged associates of Kidan with murdering Boulis in February 2001.

Documents filed in legal disputes over the casino boats show Kidan paid \$240,000 in 2001 to businesses affiliated with Anthony Moscatiello and Anthony Ferrari, two of the three men whom Fort Lauderdale police charged with Boulis' slaying, according to the Washington Post and Florida newspapers. Kidan has denied involvement in the slaying..

Ney says that Michael Scanlon, a former aide to DeLay, asked members of his staff if Ney would enter the SunCruz remarks into the Congressional Record. Ney said he had no idea the deal was tied to Abramoff.

"They said there were some bad players in this business, this guy [Kidan] was a decent guy and could I put a statement in the Congressional Record," Ney said in the earlier interview.. He said he was "furious" to learn of Kidan's problems several months later. Ney said that after Scanlon called to apologize, it was "the last time I ever dealt with" Scanlon.

Who footed bill for Scottish excursion?

Ney said he had no idea that Scanlon and Abramoff were working together. The Justice Department and Senate Indian Affairs Committee are investigating whether the pair swindled more than \$80 million from Indian tribes who hired Abramoff as a lobbyist.

A series of e-mail exchanges released last year by the Senate committee showed Abramoff and Scanlon depicting the Indians as stupid and referring to them as "monkeys."

Those e-mails also indicated that Ney agreed to insert a special provision in an election reform bill that would have let the Tigua Indian tribe, represented by Abramoff, reopen a casino. The deal fell through when the group couldn't find backing in the U.S. Senate.

The Tiguas nonetheless sent Ney \$32,000 in campaign donations and, according to the e-mails, were asked by Abramoff to foot bills for an August 2002 golf trip to Scotland for Ney, Abramoff and several other prominent Republicans. Tigua representatives say they didn't pay for the trip, and it's still unclear who paid the group's expenses, or what it did in Scotland besides play golf.

Ney's financial disclosure report says the National Center for Public Policy, a conservative communications and research group with ties to Abramoff, footed Ney's \$3,200 bill.

But the center's president, Amy Ridenour, told the Senate Indian Affairs Committee her group had nothing to do with the trip.

David Safavian, another Republican on the golf trip who was a top Bush administration procurement official, told his employer at the time, the U.S. General Services Administration, that Abramoff himself was paying.

Safavian was charged recently with obstructing a federal investigation for concealing his aid for Abramoff projects when he obtained permission to go on the trip.

He resigned from his job with the White House Office of Management and Budget.

Ney's disclosure documents indicate the excursion included visits to the British and Scottish parliaments, although Newsweek magazine reported last week that those legislative bodies had no official records of a Ney visit. Ney's spokesman, Brian Walsh, told Newsweek that the congressman's trip was informal and that he couldn't name whom Ney met there.

Ney said Abramoff had told him Ridenour's group paid for the trip, and that's why he listed the group as the sponsor. He also said he thought the trip would raise money for a charity to aid children in Scotland and Washington, D.C.

"I later found out that it didn't raise money for anything," he said.

Democrats to emphasize ethics in election

Democrats say that during next year's elections, they will depict Ney's aid to Abramoff as part of widespread GOP corruption that includes the coin investment scandal in Columbus, DeLay's indictment and a Securities and Exchange Commission inquiry into possible insider trading by Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, Republican of Tennessee.

"If there is one politician in Washington and Columbus that links the culture of corruption and pay-to-play that goes on in both places, Bob Ney is that poster child," said Ohio Democratic Party communications director Brian Rothenberg.

The only Democrat who has filed to run against Ney next year, Chillicothe Mayor Joe Sulzer, says ethics will be the major issue in the race. He said Ney's constituents have questions about his ties to Abramoff, as well as \$34,000 that Ney reported winning in a London casino card game during a 2003 trip to England.

"I think the power and the money have engulfed him and he is more interested in that than in dealing with his constituents," Sulzer said.

Carl Forti, communications director for the National Republican Congressional Committee, said that he doubts Sulzer will be able to unseat Ney and that voters in Ney's district aren't paying attention to the Abramoff matter. He said Democrats won't be able to make ethics a strong national issue because several of their own officeholders, like U.S. Rep. William Jefferson of Louisiana, are also under criminal investigation.

Ohio State University political scientist John Kessel says Ney will be hard to defeat because congressional districts in Ohio are typically drawn to protect incumbents and because few Ohio voters are aware of Ney's role in Washington controversies.

“Running a campaign that makes Bob Ney a poster child for incompetence and scandals might give them a shot, although it would be a longshot,” says Kessel. “But they could make something out of it.”

To reach this Plain Dealer reporter: [seaton@plained.com](mailto:seaton@plained.com), 216-999-4212

© 2005 The Plain Dealer

© 2005 cleveland.com All Rights Reserved.