

FCC orders probe of Williams-Bush agreement

WASHINGTON (AP)—The chairman of the Federal Communications Commission ordered an investigation Friday into whether conservative commentator Armstrong Williams broke the law by failing to disclose he was paid by the Bush administration to plug the president's education agenda.

The investigation relates to provisions that require disclosure of such arrangements, FCC Chairman Michael Powell said in a brief statement.

Also Friday, two Democratic senators asked the Government Accountability Office, Congress' investigative arm, to review whether any other federal agencies have paid commentators to support the administration's agenda.

Sens. Byron Dorgan, D-N.D., and Ron Wyden, D-Ore., asked the Government Accountability Office to investigate whether the Education Department's payment to Williams violated a ban on propaganda — and, if so, to determine who should be held accountable.

"There are real questions whether this is a real expenditure," Dorgan said in an

interview. "This has all the makings of political payola."

The FCC and GAO probes are the latest in a growing controversy over Williams' deal with the Education Department to promote the No Child Left Behind Act.

Williams was paid \$240,000 as part of at least a \$1.3 million commitment the department had with a public relations firm, Ketchum. Williams produced ads with Education Secretary Rod Paige to promote the controversial law.

He was also hired to provide media time to Paige and to persuade other Blacks in media to talk about the sweeping education reforms, records show.

On Thursday, Paige announced his department had opened an internal review. Democratic and Republican members of a Senate panel that oversees education funding demanded department records related to the case.

President Bush, in an interview published Friday in USA Today, said, "The Cabinet needs to take a good look and make sure this kind of thing doesn't happen again."

Both Williams, a nationally syndicated radio, TV and

print personality, and Paige maintain their arrangement was legal. Williams has acknowledged it was an "obvious conflict of interest" to accept money and then support the education law in his weekly newspaper column.

In an op-ed posted on the Web site for the industry magazine, PRWeek, Ketchum chief executive officer Ray Kotcher said the firm agreed that Williams was wrong for not having disclosed the information.

"We agree, particularly because with government contracts, the public has a right to know about the relationship that spokespeople may have to the issues or government agency they represent," Kotcher wrote.

He also said Ketchum, with help from an outside firm, has started a review of all its federal contracts in an effort that would "surely yield recommendations to improve transparency."

The announcement from Powell, a Republican, came as FCC officials said thousands of complaints had come into the agency regarding Williams. No precise number was available Friday. Free Press, a media reform advo-

cacy group, had said it was forwarding more than 12,000 complaints to the FCC.

"In this era of huge corporate media, it is becoming harder and harder to tell the difference between news and entertainment, to differentiate between information and propaganda," FCC Commissioner Michael Copps, a Democrat, said Friday.

An investigation also could extend to the stations that carried the program, if the broadcaster knew of Wil-

liams' arrangement but did not make that clear to viewers, aides to FCC Commissioner Jonathan Adelstein, a Democrat, have said.

Powell on Friday also ordered the FCC to investigate a radio station programmer in Buffalo, N.Y., who was fired by Entercom Communications Corp. for breaking the station's rules against taking gifts from business contacts.

Both that incident and the Williams case were being

investigated at the FCC for possible violations of so-called "payola" statutes, Powell said. The law requires disclosure of any payment or gift for airing any material for broadcast, such as a radio disc jockey being paid to play a particular recording.

In the GAO request, Dorgan and Wyden also asked for a government-wide review of any payments to journalists, commentators or talk show hosts to promote the administration's policies.

O.J.'s daughter charged with slapping policeman in Miami

MIAMI (AP)—O.J. Simpson's daughter was arrested by police who said she swore at them and slapped an officer's hand while they investigated reports of a fight outside a Miami high school gym.

Sydney Simpson, 19, was charged on Saturday with disorderly conduct and resisting arrest without violence, the Miami police report said. She was released after agreeing to appear in court on the misdemeanor charges. No court date has been set.

Police said Simpson screamed obscenities at them and refused to quiet down while they questioned two 16- and 17-year-old girls, who accused Simpson of hitting them in the face outside the Ransom Everglades School after a basketball game.

The girls declined to press charges against

Simpson, but police said they charged her with disorderly conduct because she interfered with their investigation.

The officers said they added the resisting arrest charge because "the defendant slapped Officer (Daniel) Rodriguez in the right hand" as they tried to take her into custody.

Simpson's attorney was not immediately available for comment on Wednesday.

Simpson graduated last year from the Miami school that lost the basketball game to Ransom Everglades and now attends college in Boston.

She and her brother, Justin, moved to Miami with their father after the former football star was acquitted in 1995 of murdering their mother, Nicole Brown Simpson, and her friend, Ron Goldman, in California.



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