

Sharpton: Fundraising didn't break any laws

NEW YORK (AP) - The Rev. Al Sharpton said Tuesday that he complied with campaign finance laws while he was a presidential candidate, despite reports that federal authorities had opened a criminal probe of fundraising related to the campaign.

The Philadelphia Inquirer, citing unidentified sources, reported Monday that the FBI in New York had begun investigating Sharpton's

fundraising as a spinoff of an unrelated criminal probe involving city officials and businessmen in Philadelphia.

It did not specify the exact nature of the Sharpton probe, the existence of which was first reported in the Philadelphia Daily News on April 5.

"Nobody has come to me to ask about this report of funds and this is almost two years later," Sharpton told

The Associated Press.

The FBI declined to comment.

During the Philadelphia corruption investigation, local Democratic fundraiser Ronald A. White and Detroit businessman La-Van Hawkins reportedly were wiretapped having a conversation in which Hawkins expressed suspicions that Sharpton had failed to report money they had raised for his

campaign.

Sharpton's campaign reports, however, do list many checks collected by the pair, and Sharpton told the AP that "everything given was reported."

According to the wiretaps, White and Hawkins were planning to raise enough in contributions for Sharpton to help him qualify for federal matching funds. To qualify, Sharpton needed to raise

\$5,000 in each of 20 states.

"The idea of getting matching funds is to show that you are raising money. It would have been a contradiction not to report the money," Sharpton said.

Prosecutors have said Hawkins and White hoped Sharpton would introduce them to the man who controlled New York City's pension fund, in the hopes that the fund would invest in one

of their business ventures. Sharpton set up the meeting, but the pension fund did not invest in the venture.

Sharpton said no wrongdoing was committed in his business dealings with the men.

"They asked me to introduce them to several business officials," Sharpton said in a telephone interview. "Networking is what leaders do; (See Sharpton, Page 13)

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was the last piece.

All parties lived up to their end of the bargain, all except the new administration of the Las Vegas Housing Authority. The most troubling aspect of this decision is that this spacious property has been vacant for five years. Now they want to pull the plug on it, and, by their own admission, they don't have a plan for what they want to do with it.

For the past three years, residents of public housing and Section 8 have been getting prepared by counselors and other advisors to have them ready for homeownership. The Housing Authority, by its own admission, has 201 residents who are above 50 percent of median income in Section 8 and 164 residents who are above 50 percent of median income in public housing. That's 365 residents who may not be able to qualify right now but with assistance from the different organizations would be able to qualify by the time the homes were built.

Instead of LVHA keeping with its mission to empower economically disadvantaged people to attain economic self-sufficiency, the Housing Authority has determined that they would like to sell the land for 2.2 million dollars — a move that is contrary to the dis-

position agreement signed by an assistant secretary of HUD who, in 2002, approved this project for homeownership.

In that same disposition agreement the LVHA stated, "Affordable housing is a constant issue in Las Vegas." Well, if it was an issue in 2002, it's an even greater issue in 2005. That being said, how can the board, in all good conscience and without a legitimate reason, afford to turn down a project created by a developer with a demonstrated history of success in this area?

The board's second reason for not wanting to go forward with the development was the Project Specific Agreements provision, which just required the attorney to do an amendment to the original agreement. On the board's Friday agenda, there were two projects that LVHA was proposing to cancel. But my question is this: Why would it approve one, which doesn't have a Project Specific Agreement either, and not approve the other one? You figure it out, because I sure can't.

This Housing Authority is embattled and has been since just prior to the death of previous Executive Director Frederick Brown.

Among the series of the Housing Authority's most serious problems:

- They are under a Voluntary Compliance Agreement or VCA, which means that HUD has found some major Fair Housing deficiencies and, as a result, is requiring the Housing Authority to develop and implement a written plan to correct the deficiencies within a three-year time frame. HUD will monitor the Housing Authority through quarterly reporting to ensure compliance with the agreement.

- They threw away tens of thousands of their LVHA dollars in expenses and man-hours on the Rulon Earl Mobile Home Project; with the plans completed, they were ready to build 57 or 58 pads for Seniors, but never did.

- They have 70 vacancies in public housing and a waiting list of over 2,000 residents. So, how can you have vacancies when people are waiting to move in?

- They're indicating that they want to pay back the money to the developer for the Otto Merida project with monies received from Gerson Park — funds which can only be used for public housing — so now, they seem headed toward misappropriating funds.

- In addition to those major troubles, they have problems with several of their units be-

ing infested with mold. Add to that, lawsuits they're facing.

Where is the leadership of this organization? How long will the board continue to allow its organization to throw away money like they have an open checkbook? What we have here is a case of the fox watching the hen house.

All of the viable projects that have been developed to bring affordable rental units and for sale homes to low income individuals and families were developed under the strategic plan implemented by the previous Executive Director Brown. The current Executive Director Parvis Ghadiri, walks about with an annual salary of \$100,000 plus; but under his leadership in the past three years, how many units has he produced for low income residents? By any accurate calculation, none. He is good at talking the talk. Mr. Ghadiri, your residents would like to see you walk the walk.

Dora LaGrande is an employee of Community Development Programs Center of Nevada.

For the Record's multi-part series on predatory lending practices will resume in upcoming issues.

Walters

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Why not? The United Nations is an international agency that has a mandate to provoke the peaceful resolution of disputes, not to countenance war, especially preemptive war, where it was not clear that Saddam Hussein had the capacity to threaten anyone with weapons of mass destruction. In fact, although Saddam Hussein found a way to make some money from his own oil, his military capacity had been severely limited, both by the Gulf War of 1991 and by the quarantine maintained by the U.S. control of the Iraq air space. His dissent was squarely within his mandate as Secretary General.

Now, there was another report just out by another independent U.S. Commission investigating the quality of the intelligence services that developed the view that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destructions. The commission reaffirmed what we now know: There were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

But instead of the newspapers calling for the resignation of George Bush, they went after the intelligence agencies such as the CIA. George Tennes made his exit a few months ago because he knew that he would be made the fall-guy for the administration's use of intelligence that many people knew was questionable.

The report did not go into the allegations

made by some senior officials that the Bush administration came into office with a desire to invade Iraq.

It did not look into the fact, as widely reported, that the White House pressured the intelligence agencies at every point, in fact, to dig up dirt on Iraq and to massage the intelligence until it said something that was a worthy pretext to use to go to war. Nothing was said about that; and since it didn't, the report exists as part of a post-invasion cover-up to blame the bad intelligence on one or two agencies (the military agencies were exempt because that would have involved Bush's buddy, Donald Rumsfeld).

The cover-up continues with the Bush administration having gone shamelessly into Iraq for the geopolitical purposes of the control of oil, the security of Israel and added the payoff of Bush's campaign contributors, but discovered "spreading Democracy" as a major theme. It's almost sickening now that some Democrats have taken the bait that there has been a pivotal turn in American motivations with promoting elections, which are supposed to justify this ill-timed, ill-conceived and ill-managed adventure. Give me Kofi Annan any day, and save the double standard.

Ron Walters is a professor of government and politics at the University of Maryland-College Park.

Curry

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eign lands. At the same time, however, they do not expect to have their government knowingly put them in harm's way."

Another business group, the Association of Corporate Travel Executives, expressed opposition to the RFID "bugs."

President Greeley Koch states, "There is no doubt that RFID technology can be shielded or coded in some way. But it is, once again, developing false reliance on technology. A mass-produced, cheap, electronic identification system that is bound to be lost or stolen in large quantities is bound to be defeated."

The State Department dismisses such statements as exaggerations, arguing that the new passports will reduce fraud and provide another layer of protection.

One security expert, Jon Callas, told *Wired* magazine: "There are cheaper, safer alternatives. This is a case where a security measure is putting the people carrying it at risk. When I travel abroad, I spend a certain amount of effort trying to look inconspicuous...nonetheless, I carry my passport."

Scannell, the privacy advocate, says the State Department could reduce passport fraud by using barcodes similar to those used in retail. Ironically, that's exactly where RFID originated. It is used by Wal-Mart and other retailers to track inventory. Price varies from \$500 to several thousand dollars.

Under the State Department plan, new passports will be issued to diplomats and State Department personnel by late summer. They will be issued to everyone, beginning this fall or winter. Because passports are good for up to 10 years, it will be 2016 before all passports contain the electronic chip.

The debate over how best to use technology to improve our security is a classic one; it must balance the need to reduce the number of fake or altered documents — in order to better protect U.S. citizens — with steps to protect personal privacy but not give would-be terrorists or thieves an upper hand.

A similar debate is underway in other forums. For example, the Electronic Frontier Foundation has testified against a San Francisco Public Library Commission plan to employ RFID technology.

"As we explain below, RFID technology raises great privacy concerns because insecure RFID tags will permit inventorying of people's possessions and tracking of people via their possessions," the group wrote. "These risks are especially great where books and other reading materials are concerned, because both privacy and freedom of expression are at stake."

Whether we're using our passports or checking out books, so much is at stake. And we must be vigilant if we are to protect our freedoms.

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