



## Sex Isn't the Only Thing for Sale in Washington: Ann Woolner

By Ann Woolner

May 4 (Bloomberg) -- The case of the Washington madam has the nation's capital wondering who will be outed next. More Bush administration officials, promises ABC News, which is serving as the madam's gumshoe in return for a sensational story.

Already ABC has named Randall Tobias, deputy secretary of state who by day was enforcing the administration's anti-prostitution policy across the globe. By night he was paying the madam's \$300-an-hour escorts. For massages, he says.

Deborah Jeane Palfrey, indicted on prostitution-related charges, admits to sending young women to male clients but insists they were supposed to perform nothing more illicit than ``fantasy sex."

Prostitution comes in many forms, especially in Washington. A prostitute is someone ``who sells one's abilities, talent, or name for an unworthy purpose," according to the second definition given in the American Heritage Dictionary.

Add to the items for sale one's position of influence, and you can see that prostitution runs rampant in Washington.

Lawmakers sell help to contributors. Policy makers tilt policy toward powerful constituencies. Officials run their corners of government to serve the White House instead of the general public.

Why stop with the Washington madam in our hunt for the illicit?

Consider, for example, Julie A. MacDonald, who, until her resignation this week, ran the Fish and Wildlife Service more for the benefit of industry than fish or wildlife.

### Internal Documents

MacDonald left amid complaints she gave internal documents to industry lawyers and lobbyists opposing federal protection for land and endangered species. And scientists have been saying for years that political appointees at the Interior Department forced them to rewrite scientific findings to make them friendlier to companies.

Also under investigation is Lurita Doan, head of the General Services Administration, who offered to use her agency to help elect congressional Republicans and defeat Democratic ones, witnesses say.

And then there is Alberto Gonzales, U.S. attorney general. Beginning as White House counsel, he has pleased his patron in multiple ways. For pay and position, he twisted the law on torture, wiretaps and due process. Now there's evidence he tried to turn U.S. attorney offices into a Republican re-election arm.

This week we learn that Gonzales's White House liaison, Monica Goodling, is accused of considering party affiliation when hiring career lawyers for nonpolitical positions, an absolute no-no.

### Ultimate Boss

Now consider that President George W. Bush is the ultimate boss of the aforementioned public officials. You might call him their Palfrey. Political censoring of scientific studies has turned up in the Commerce and Interior Departments, the Food and Drug Administration and the Environmental Protection Agency.

Studies on global warming, abstinence-only sex education and the effects of abortion were all slanted to comport with administration policy. So was an investigation into allegedly widespread voter fraud, which turns out to be mostly a fantasy.

In the Defense Department, generals on down helped lie about Pat Tillman's death and Jessica Lynch's rescue, apparently to bolster Bush and the military in the middle of the Abu Ghraib prison scandal.

This list is a mere sampling, not an inventory of public officials selling their talent and position for unworthy causes. Other occupants of the White House come to mind, and so do Democratic names. Feel free to nominate your favorites.

Carried to Extremes

The non-sexual form of prostitution is criminal only when carried to an extreme, of course. And yet, what these folks have been doing produces far more victims than has Palfrey, whatever service her women performed.

Consider the victims the Bush administration produced through Tobias. As the head of the U.S. Agency for International Development, he withheld millions of dollars from groups fighting the HIV virus around the world because they wouldn't pledge to oppose prostitution.

Whatever you think of prostitution, it's counterproductive to denounce the very sex workers whose help -- and condom use -- is needed to curtail the spread of the deadly virus.

`` It just shows how much these policies are driven by this moralistic agenda rather than in a desire to achieve real public health goals," says Juhu Thukral, who counsels prostitutes through the Sex Workers Project at the Urban Justice Center in New York.

We can debate another time whether to legalize commercial sex. Frankly, I worry about the dehumanizing effect it has on the buyer as well as the seller, even in its least coercive form. In its most coercive form, it exploits abused teenagers and subjects them to a sordid, violent life.

But instead of going after a call girl operation involving women old enough and educated enough to freely choose the work, this administration would do far more good by cracking down on those who pervert American government for their own political or commercial purpose.

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