



BLOG | *Posted 05/02/2007 @ 2:46pm*

DC Sex Scandal: Couldn't Happen to Nicer Bunch of Guys

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I'm amused that none of my Notion colleagues have commented on the Washington, D.C. sex scandal.

Time to break this high-minded code of delicacy. Alleged madam Deborah Jane Palfrey is about to release her client list, and ABC News plans to release her phone records on Friday. To those who think they are above reveling in something so sordid: hold your high horses. I feel sorry for people whose names are dragged through the mud over personal behavior -- but not if they are right-wing

hypocrites who have supported policies interfering with other people's private lives. A couple names have been leaked already, and we shouldn't feel bad for any of them.

Particularly deserving of his current humiliation is Deputy Secretary of State Randall Tobias, Bush's former AIDS czar, whose job was to promote abstinence and monogamy rather than condoms. In his current job, he was supposed to make sure that groups getting U.S. money to fight HIV and AIDS were opposed to prostitution. (Tobias, who claims he only got massages from these call girls -- bizarre, if true, but isn't that what they always say? -- -- had to resign last weekend over Palfrey's disclosure.) This is not just about hypocrisy: conservatives seem to be more often at the center of such scandals -- though of course we can all think of some liberals and moderates, including Barney Frank and of course Bill Clinton -- because they embrace a repressive morality that seems to drive people to act out, often in weird, alienated ways.

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A group called the Sex Workers Project which provides legal services and advocacy to sex workers, pointed out, in a statement, the "irony... that Tobias was the chief enforcer and mouthpiece of the Anti-Prostitution Pledge" which cost Brazil \$40 million in USAID money, and stripped funding from services like drop-in centers and English classes -- which could help people move on to other lines of work -- for sex workers in Cambodia and Bangladesh. Condemning -- and, especially, refusing to help -- sex workers is stupid policy: prostitutes who insist on protecting themselves through condom use can play a valuable role in halting the spread of HIV/AIDS. Tobias's connections to an escort agency, the Sex Workers Project notes, "provide an opportunity to reflect on the ineffective and morality-driven policies he enforced."