Written by Charles Jay
Wednesday, 26 February 2003 18:00

The 37th Round

In case you haven't seen the letter Senator John McCain wrote to Nevada governor Kenny Guinn several days ago, let me reproduce that for you:

Dear Governor Guinn,

I am writing to express my concern regarding recent conflict-of-interest allegations involving Nevada State Athletic Commission Chairman, Luther Mack, and Vice Chairman, Dr. Tony Alamo, Jr. These allegations are particularly troubling in light of the historically high regard in which the Nevada Commission has been held.

The United States Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation, which I chair, has worked diligently over the past seven years to curb the unscrupulous behavior that plagues the sport of boxing. Although two federal boxing laws have been enacted during this time, these laws have not been enforced by either federal or state officials, and the sport continues to cry out for reform. If true, the allegations concerning the Nevada State Athletic Commission described below would be contrary to the efforts of this Committee and Congress to improve the sport, and further evidence of the need for broader federal oversight of boxing.

As I assume you know, Dr. Alamo is the son of Mr. Tony Alamo, Sr., a Senior Vice President at Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino, a hotel licensed as a boxing promoter and regulated by the Nevada Commission, and considered by many as the world's premier venue for professional boxing matches. I understand that Dr. Alamo, who you appointed to the Nevada Commission in September 2001, was recently elevated to Vice Chairman by Chairman Mack, replacing the knowledgeable and well-respected former Vice Chairman, Dr. Flip Homansky.

It has been alleged that Dr. Alamo's relationship to the overseer of boxing at Mandalay Bay (his father, Mr. Alamo) conflicts with, or at a minimum, appears to conflict with Dr. Alamo's responsibility impartially to discharge his duty to regulate the sport of professional boxing on behalf of the State of Nevada. Dr. Alamo's original appointment to the Commission, and his recent promotion to vice chairman, have been widely criticized by many in the boxing industry.

In addition to concerns that have been raised regarding Dr. Alamo, conflict-of-interest allegations have also been leveled against Chairman Mack.

The Nevada State Code of Ethical Standards specifically states, "A public officer or employee shall not seek or accept any gift, service, favor, employment, engagement, emolument or economic opportunity which would tend improperly to influence a reasonable person in his position to depart from the faithful and impartial discharge of his public duties." Furthermore, federal boxing law strictly prohibits any "person who administers or enforces State boxing laws" from receiving "any compensation from any person who sanctions, arranges, or promotes

professional boxing matches."

Despite these proscriptions, I understand that Chairman Mack, a resident of Reno, Nevada, has on several occasions received significantly discounted room rates from Mr. Alamo and Mandalay Bay, including a December 2002 stay only two weeks before Mr. Mack promoted Dr. Alamo to vice chairman. When questioned during a February 7, 2003, interview with ESPN regarding his receipt of discounted room rates from Mandalay Bay, the Chairman responded that his conduct was not out of the ordinary, and added, "in all honesty, a lot of judges and referees get their rooms for free."

I strongly encourage you to review Dr. Alamo's position on the Commission to determine whether his continued service is in the best interest of professional boxing in your state, and to examine boxing officials' receipt of compensation from regulated entities. Given that the Nevada State Athletic Commission is considered the standard bearer for all boxing commissions in this country, it is imperative that you remain vigilant in maintaining the highest possible ethical standards.

Sincerely,

John McCain

Chairman

Look at the monster we've created.

I guess it's safe to say that Tony Alamo Jr. won't become a boxing "czar" if McCain has anything to do with it. That letter pretty much clinched it.

Of course, there are some things about the Nevada situation that deserve looking into. And as we've mentioned, with the Ali Act in question it can very easily become a federal matter, which would take any investigation outside the scope and control of the people who have taken so much money from the Mandalay Bay casino - Governor Guinn and Attorney General Brian Sandoval.

Actually, when you put this thing in its proper perspective, it's kind of funny - on the one hand you've got NSAC chairman Luther Mack, who's been taking heat for accepting what may or may not have been a substantial discount on a hotel room from Mandalay Bay.

Then on the other hand, you've got Guinn, who HAS taken hundreds of thousands of dollars from the Mandalay Bay, and suddenly Tony Alamo Jr. is on the boxing commission, overseeing his father, who does the bidding (in boxing terms) for the big contributor. Then you have Sandoval - who HAS taken political contributions approaching six figures, or more, from the Mandalay Bay - writing disclaimers for Alamo Jr. in order to "reconcile" his presence on the commission, then letters to ESPN like this:

February 11, 2003

Rob Beiner, Producer

ESPN Friday Night Fights

ESPN Plaza

Bristol, CT 06010

Re: Nevada Athletic Commission

Dear Mr. Beiner:

On the last two editions of Friday Night Fights, two of your announcers

speculated about certain actions of some of the Nevada Athletic

Commissioners. The reports demonstrated a lack of understanding about

Nevada and federal law. Consequently, I feel compelled to assure you

that all five Athletic Commissioners have acted in full compliance with

applicable federal and state laws. These laws include the federal

Professional Boxing Safety Act, as amended by the Muhammad Ali Boxing

Reform Act; Nevada's Ethics in Government law; and the Administrative

Procedure Act.

It is a true privilege of mine to work with these honorable gentlemen.

Please let me know if I can be of further assistance.

Sincere Regards,

BRIAN SANDOVAL

Attorney General

And we're being asked to believe that there's absolutely no connection to politics at all. Of course not.

At the same time, though, it has been drilled into the minds of boxing fans that if Don King does some intense lobbying for one of his fighters, buys some advertising space in the program for one of those WBC conventions, overpays sanctioning fees, and puts some judges into hotel

rooms, that it's so dirty and unholy.

Maybe it is. But my question, for purposes of this piece, is this - what's the fundamental difference between what a guy like King is customarily accused of doing and what is going on in Nevada? Not much, when you consider that essentially it's all about the same thing - money changing hands and favors being granted as a result.

Of course, when someone named Dean Juipe writes in the

Las Vegas Sun

that
"The state, through its attorney general's office, has looked into the matter and its supplemental allegations and come to a rational conclusion: No harm, no foul", I'm convinced I should feel much more secure about everything.

I'm also convinced there is no shortage of enablers out there in the press.

One of the reasons I embarked on "Operation Cleanup" was to tear away at these hypocrisies, and to point out that just because you are white, put a suit and tie on every day and call yourself a "public servant" doesn't mean that mean that you're not right down there in the gutter with everyone else when it comes to playing dirty little games.

McCain, of course, is not immune either. Sure, I concur with many of the points he made in his letter - how could I not, since he took most of those points directly from ME - but the letter was not without considerable political overtones. McCain, who is heavily financed by the television industry, and at odds with Nevada's casino industry by virtue of his quest to have college sports betting banned, would to be holding the upper hand over the Silver State, and particularly Senator Harry Reid, who has opposed McCain on the betting issue..

I'm not sure what McCain has ever done to "curb unscrupulous behavior". But it does seem clear that one of McCain's primary purposes is in "leveraging" the pressure he can put on Nevada into pressure on Reid, who has a competing piece of
legislation intended to create a "national boxing commission". Reid wants TV networks - McCain's benefactors - to be subject to some form of regulation in their boxing activities, and McCain naturally would like him to drop that idea completely.

If he feels he absolutely has to, McCain will use this Nevada situation against Reid. He'll make the natural connection of Reid to a state that has a "questionable" commission which is a product of a questionable political structure, in the hope that
Reid's position as a senator from a "major boxing state", which has been part of his sales pitch, is weakened.

Of course, in doing that, McCain will leave himself wide open on both flanks. And it'll be up to Reid to figure where those vulnerabilities lie and how to capitalize upon them.

And you thought you were going to REDUCE the politics in boxing?

Hey, this is America. It's ALL about politics. Down and dirty. I love it.

Gee - can I play too?

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