

JOHN SOLOMON'S PHONE RECORDS

Matt at TP follows up on Drudge's report that John Solomon is moving to the Moonie Times as Executive Editor with a summary of Solomon's greatest hits.

- *Solomon tried to link Sen. Harry Reid (D-NV) to the Jack Abramoff scandal by reporting on Reid contacts with Abramoff-tied lobbyist, but overlooked the fact that Reid voted against lobbyists' favored bill.*
- *Solomon took comments by Ambassador Joe Wilson out of context in effort to claim he "acknowledged his wife was no longer in an undercover job at the time Novak's column first identified her."*
- *In a non-story, Solomon reported that Reid accepted of boxing tickets from a state government agency, despite and then did the opposite of what the agency wanted.*
- *In 2006, Solomon claimed that Reid*

“collected a \$1.1 million windfall on a Las Vegas land sale,” even though Reid actually only made a \$700,000 profit on the sale.

- *Solomon wrote a story calling Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) a hypocrite on campaign finance reform, but buried quotes by critics of big money in government exonerating him for “all the things the article criticizes him for doing.”*
- *In July, Solomon “devoted nearly 1,300 words to the ‘controversy’ surrounding” John Edwards’ haircut.*
- *In a front page story, Solomon baselessly suggested that John Edwards had engaged in a shady land deal, but never provided proper context for the sale. His reporting was criticized by the Post’s ombudsman.*

As Matt says, all these stories make Solomon perfectly suited to work for a spooked-up crazy

Korean who also happens to head up a cult.

But there's one incident that makes this move even more interesting. Back in the halcyon pre-9/11 days, Solomon got involved into a fight with DOJ over his phone records. Basically, Solomon discovered that then Senator Robert Torricelli had been picked up on a wiretap of known mobsters, talking about fund-raising. The transcripts of the wiretaps Solomon received were grand jury materials; when Solomon wrote his story on the taps, he alerted the mobsters that they were tapped and publicized Torricelli's mob ties. So DOJ got his phone records to figure out who his source was and to prevent him from doing further work on the story.

Charles Lewis: There were news accounts that in August 2001 your home phone records were subpoenaed secretly by a federal grand jury. Can you give a little context?

John Solomon: Sure. I was working on a series of stories about what the government knew about Sen. Robert Torricelli's ethics misdoings and the body of evidence that was available [going] back to the early 1990s. I found that the U.S. Attorney's Office in New Jersey had evidence that he had taken, basically, a loan guarantee from a donor (and long-time friend), bought some stocks and made a killing on it—a \$144,000 profit. He repaid the loan, including less than \$1,000 for the guarantee. Torricelli took this donor on a series of government-sponsored trade missions and hooked him up all across the world with the imprimatur of Congress. The U.S. attorney whose office declined prosecution was nominated by Torricelli to become a federal judge. She became a federal judge. The person he nominated to take her job then came into possession of new information. They

intercepted Sen. Torricelli on a wiretap talking to some known mob folks just before the 1996 Democratic convention in Chicago, when they were basically talking about fundraising. I obtained excerpts of the wiretap, which would be covered by Grand Jury secrecy, wrote that story, and again the U.S. attorney declined prosecution. Torricelli had recommended that U.S. attorney for his job as well.

CL: Good Lord!

JS: Within five days of the second story running—the wiretap story—the U.S. attorney in New York, Mary Jo White, a leftover appointee of President Clinton, went to the Justice Department and asked for permission to subpoena my home phone records. Attorney General Ashcroft was recused from all matters involving Torricelli because he served with him in the Senate. Deputy Attorney General Larry Thompson had just been confirmed and had not yet started. So current FBI director Bob Mueller, then an assistant attorney general, was the acting attorney general for the matter and signed the warrant. They never informed the news media, even though the Justice Department guidelines require that you inform the media in advance of getting a reporter's records or notebooks and that you enter into a period of negotiations to try to protect the First Amendment and Fourth Amendment privileges. They simply went and got my home phone records. The law required that they inform me within 30 days. They signed two extensions to 90 days. The second extension brought it just past the point when Mueller's confirmation as FBI director had been completed and the Senate confirmed him. So the Senate never knew he had signed a warrant for a reporter's phone records. Then they sent

me a belated letter saying they had taken my phone records. The Justice Department has indicated to us that they were trying to identify the source of my stories. They were actually trying to stop the publication of a story [about Sen. Torricelli] that I was working on and tried to find out who I was talking to and cut off the flow of information. [my emphasis]

Thus far, the story is just the earliest example of the Bush Administration accessing information about journalists' source. But once the Bush Administration got the information, things turned downright Nixonian.

[JS]: Later we went back after them and began investigating the issues. One of the things we found out was that the Justice Department was preparing a media onslaught to try to counter-attack the Associated Press and the media. We have evidence that they violated the Privacy Act and shared information and my phone records with people who they wanted to go on TV to try to impugn me.

[snip]

CL: Do you think they found the name of your source when they got your home phone records? Did it worry you?

JS: I'm kind of constrained from talking about what I think they may have found... for many reasons. One is I don't want to let them know what I might know. There is no doubt that they obtained a substantial block of my phone records.

Before all of the crummy reporting that Matt describes, John Solomon claims, the Bush Administration prepared an Ellsberg-like campaign to discredit Solomon's reporting (and, perhaps, reporting more generally).

Through all of Solomon's crummy reporting at the WaPo, I've wondered what the Bush Administration thought it had on Solomon. And now, as he moves to take over the Moonie Times, I'm wondering even more.