

FROM THE CHAMBERPOT: A CAREFULLY WORDED NONDENIAL DENIAL

The Chamber of Commerce has responded to ThinkProgress' reporting of the Chamber's discussions with Hunton & Williams about an intelligence campaign against USChamberWatch and other anti-Chamber efforts. It purports to deny any connection with Hunton & Williams and HBGary.

More Baseless Attacks on the Chamber

by Tom Collamore

We're incredulous that anyone would attempt to associate such activities with the Chamber as we've seen today from the Center for American Progress. The security firm referenced by ThinkProgress was not hired by the Chamber or by anyone else on the Chamber's behalf. We have never seen the document in question nor has it ever been discussed with us.

While ThinkProgress and the Center for American Progress continue to orchestrate a baseless smear campaign against the Chamber, we will continue to remain focused on promoting policies that create jobs.

But it does no such thing.

First, note what they are denying:

1. The "security firm"

referenced by TP was not hired by the Chamber or by anyone else on the Chamber's behalf

2. "We have never seen "the document in question"

By "security firm," it presumably means HBGary, the one of the three security firms involved that got hacked.

Note, first of all, that they're not denying hiring Hunton & Williams, the law firm/lobbyist which they hired last year to sue the Yes Men. They're not even denying that they retain Hunton & Williams right now.

What they're denying is that they—or, implicitly, Hunton & Williams, on their behalf—hired HBGary.

But as I suggested in my last post on this, they are not paying HBGary (or Hunton & Williams) for the work they're doing right now; **they're all working on spec**, to get the business (business which I'm guessing they're not going to get).

— Despite earlier conversations with John Woods (and/or Richard), H&W is unable/unwilling to pay any fees/costs to us for the "Phase I" demo build-out. Bob Q was under the impression we were willing to do this work at risk and then present jointly with H&W to the Chamber. I was very clear in telling him we had a different understanding based on multiple conversations with others at H&W. At the end of the day, though, they are at a point now where they won't commit any funds to this project until we've helped them earn buy-in from their Client (the Chamber).

— Based on this, I said I would talk with you all and get buy-in for the following course of action:

1. Meet with Bob and team early next week (Mon/Tues) to get additional metadata and select focused topic(s) for the demo to the Chamber
2. Work as joint team to build 5-10 min demo (along the lines of the Iranian shipping demo – which is what Bob Q said sold the Chamber in the first place – great work Sam!)
3. Brief demo to the Chamber on 14 Feb (or potentially a few days later...based on confirming schedule for meeting with Chamber)
4. Once approved, begin enduring work at agreed upon rates (approx. \$250-300k per month for the entire team – both services and license fees)

That email was sent February 3, discussing a possible meeting with them on February 14.

In other words, no, the Chamber has not “hired” HBGary. They’ve gotten HBGary to do a month of work for free to decide whether they want to hire them.

Then there’s the Chamber’s denial that they saw “the document in question.” That’s not a denial they’ve seen a proposal offering to create false documents to try to fool USChamberWatch and hire false personas to try to impugn the reputation of those who criticize the Chamber. They presumably mean to claim they’ve neither seen nor discussed the document linked by TP, a one page “Proposal for the Chamber” with a Themis header and an October 29 date.

An email chain between HBGary’s Aaron Barr and Berico Technologies’ Samuel Kremin may explain the document. At 9:54AM, Kremin asked for Barr’s help creating a mock intel report **to give to Hunton & Williams.**

Today, like I said in the other Email, we’ll be creating mock intel reports to give to Hunton. Could you make up a mock

report that you think would be the most helpful for the lay people at Hunton to understand what you would be doing?

It appears the document was preparation for a meeting—not yet scheduled at the time—with their Hunton & Williams contact on including them in a pitch to the Chamber.

Regarding meeting with Bob, I hope that either tomorrow or more likely wednesday we can meet.

In other words, the document TP linked to was for Hunton & Williams, not the Chamber.

Barr creates the content we see in the more finished report—along with more information on Velvet Revolution. But he asks Kremin “to pretty it up.”

Ok i am going to type this out and if you don't mind prettying this up. The Palantir load on my MacBook corrupted the system files so I need to reinstall when i get home. So trusty iPad has to do for now.

Note the irony: Palantir's software—the stuff they were pitching to the Chamber—had corrupted Barr's MacBook.

Finally, it's worth noting that Barr was having real doubts about how much to show them (and the “them” here is presumably still Hunton & Williams; these passages come from two different emails both sent on October 29).

Problem with this is without a full analysis we are shooting from the hip without complete data and courses of action. I really am anxious of providing this to them for fear the will use it to judge our overall ability. Cart before the horse. Not sure if you want more direct associations with more enumerated individuals. I have some preliminary

analysis but that should be a result of paid analysis.

[snip]

Basically what it will entail is a link chart of key people in the distribution of information, background information on each individual and ways to counteract their effect on group.. I don't have these unclassified so I would have to cut from scratch and as I understood the conversation he didn't want us to put that level of effort into it? Thoughts?

In other words, even as Barr was providing the content that appears in "the document in question," he was expressing two doubts: that they hadn't done enough analysis to do a decent presentation, and that they were giving away too much analysis. (And if anyone has a suggestion what Barr might mean with his reference to "having these unclassified," I'd love to hear your suggestions).

Now, back in my consulting days, when working with a primary contractor there were always several iterations of work between when we pitched the primary and when we all, jointly, pitched the client itself.

So, sure, the Chamber didn't see **this document**. They saw one that proposed the same or very similar plots against citizen activists, probably completed a week or more later, probably containing a different level of detail (other emails discuss a November 23 meeting with a revised proposal).

They didn't hire HBGary and they didn't read the particular document TP linked to.

But that is far short of denying that they've been discussing such a plot with HBGary and/or Hunton & Williams.

This post has been updated.