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From: Mills, Cheryl D <MillsCD@state.gov>
Sent: Thursday, February 23, 2012 8:19 PM
To: H
Subject: Fw: {The Cable - VIP Distribution List} Another Obama fundraiser turns out to be a bad ambassador

From: Toiv, Nora F
Sent: Thursday, February 23, 2012 06:26 PM
To: Mills, Cheryl D
Subject: FW: {The Cable - VIP Distribution List} Another Obama fundraiser turns out to be a bad ambassador

From: Samuelson, Heather F
Sent: Thursday, February 23, 2012 6:19 PM
To: Toiv, Nora F
Subject: FW: {The Cable - VIP Distribution List} Another Obama fundraiser turns out to be a bad ambassador

From: Blumenfeld, Joshua R
Sent: Thursday, February 23, 2012 6:17 PM
To: 'Rodriguez, Miguel'; Samuelson, Heather F; Fallon, Robert M
Subject: {The Cable - VIP Distribution List} Another Obama fundraiser turns out to be a bad ambassador

I'm sure you've seen this...

Another Obama fundraiser turns out to be a bad ambassador

Posted By Josh Rogin  **Thursday, February 23, 2012 - 5:56 PM** 

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Candidate **Barack Obama** promised to end the time-honored American practice of appointing ambassadors who have no experience in foreign policy, but President Obama has completely ignored that promise, appointing fundraisers to dozens of ambassadorships all over the world.

Today, the State Department revealed that another fundraiser turned ambassador ran her embassy into the ground ... only to return to fundraising and leave the State Department to pick up the pieces.

According to a new State Department inspector general's report on the U.S. Embassy in the Bahamas, Ambassador **Nicole Avant** presided over "an extended period of dysfunctional leadership and mismanagement, which has caused problems throughout the embassy" since she was appointed by the president in 2009. Prior to being America's envoy in the Caribbean, Avant was Southern California finance co-chairwoman of Obama's presidential campaign and vice president of Interior Music Publishing.

According to her glowingly positive Wikipedia page, Avant spent her time in the Bahamas "focused on five priority initiatives: Education, Alternative Energy, Economic and Small Business Development, Women's Empowerment and Raising awareness of the challenges facing people with disabilities."

But according to the State Department's internal investigation, Avant was away from the embassy an inordinate amount of time -- mainly shuttling back and forth to her home in Los Angeles -- and when she was in town, she worked from her residence most of the day.

Avant was absent from the embassy 276 days between September 2009 and November 2011, including 102 "personal" days and 77 "work travel" days to the United States, of which only 23 were on official orders.

"Her extensive travel out of country and preference to work from the Ambassador's residence for a significant portion of the work day contributed to a perception of indifference," the report states. "The frequent absences of the Ambassador contributed to poor mission management."

Avant was out of touch partly because she didn't interact often with the State Department or anyone else in Washington, according to the inspector general. She left that to her deputy chief of mission, whom the report identified as also being poor at management and administration.

"The Ambassador had not had frequent policy-level interaction with the Department or other Washington agencies. At the beginning of her tenure, she relied unduly on her former DCM to attend to day-to-day contacts with the desk and other offices in the Department," says the report. "Interviews in Washington likewise revealed that the front office of the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs and other Washington agencies were not in regular contact with the Ambassador about the conduct of her mission. This lack of regular contact contributed to the Ambassador's sense of isolation from the Department."

Avant did take several steps to establish the embassy's equal employment opportunity program -- but not until the inspector general's visit. The embassy's program for young Foreign Service officers was neglected, critical security upgrades were not made, and the embassy paid rent on a vacant office for two years.

One might think there aren't important issues to deal with at a tropical post like the Bahamas. But the IG begs to differ, and made clear that the 154 American and 61 locally hired staff need good leadership.

"The Bahamas is a critical partner in ongoing efforts to ensure the security of the south-east flank of the United States. As it fights drug and human trafficking with U.S. and international support, the Bahamas seeks to maintain its status as a global financial center and as an important tourist destination," the report states.

Under Avant's tenure, it goes on, "cables written in the past year show little political reporting or analysis on international crime, drug smuggling, and illegal migration or on prevention of terrorism."

The inspectors visited the embassy in September and October of 2011. Avant resigned in November.

Since resigning, Avant has been active on the campaign trail. According to a Jan. 31 White House pool report, she joined **Michelle Obama** at a Beverly Hills residence for a fundraiser along with her husband, Netflix Chief Content Officer **Ted Saranados**, and **Jeffrey Katzenberg**, **Steve Bing**, **Quincy Jones**, **Harvey Weinstein**, and other celebrities.

A Feb. 15 pool report spotted her dining with Obama at a \$35,800 per plate dinner that included **George Clooney, Jim Belushi,** and Los Angeles Mayor **Antonio R. Villaraigosa.**

Avant is only the latest fundraiser cum ambassador who caused trouble for the boss. Fundraiser/Ambassador **Howard Gutman** caused a controversy in **TKcountry** last year when he made statements appearing to blame Israel for anti-Semitism.

And fundraiser/ambassador **Cynthia Stroum** left the U.S. Embassy in Luxembourg in a state of dysfunction after creating an environment that was ""aggressive, bullying, hostile and intimidating," according to a Feb. 2011 State Department investigation.

If the Obama administration is looking for a new envoy to the Bahamas who can right the ship, your humble *Cable* guy would like to put forth himself for the assignment ... we promise not to use up our personal days.

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