
Cabinet Minister's Firms Got Campaign Funds - October 7, 2005

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Federal Liberal Multiculturalism Minister Raymond Chan funnelled \$4,900 from his 2004 election campaign into his own companies, and another \$3,600 to the treasurer of one of those companies, a Vancouver Sun investigation has revealed.

Chan's campaign paid \$3,400 to Greenwood Academy and Grand Canadian Academy for advertising. Chan, MP for Richmond, owns Greenwood Academy through a company called Grand Canadian. The school is in Nanjing, China. All of its students are Chinese citizens. Hardly the place a Canadian politician would go looking for votes.

That \$3,400 is slightly more than Chan spent advertising on Fairchild Radio's AM and FM stations combined, and it's nearly three times more than he spent advertising in Ming Pao, the largest Chinese newspaper in the Lower Mainland.

Greenwood's treasurer, Klement Mui, was also paid \$3,600 by the campaign for undisclosed services rendered in May and June of 2004.

Yet another Chan company, Global Business, was paid \$1,500 for rent, heat and light.

What's interesting about that is that Global didn't even bill the campaign until October 2004 -- four months after the election.

Chan's conflict-of-interest disclosure says that he is sole owner of Grand Canadian Academy Inc. and 70 per cent owner of Grand Canadian Academy (Nanjing) Inc., two private companies that operate a school in China, as well as co-owner of Global Business

Development Inc., "an inactive family company."

It's also interesting that all of the money paid to Chan's companies and to Mui was listed among the unpaid claims in the initial election expense report. However, Elections Canada says all of those bills have since been paid.

What it adds up to is that Chan's companies and the company treasurer got slightly more than \$1 out of every \$10 spent on the campaign.

But that's not the end of the story for Chan and the Nanjing school

After his re-election, Chan was appointed secretary of state for multiculturalism. He had been secretary of state for the Asia-Pacific before he lost in the 2000 election.

As multiculturalism minister, Chan was back on the Asia circuit and his first major trip was to China in January 2005 with the Team Canada trade mission. There, among other things, Chan helped open doors for Michael Lo and Queenie Tin, the principals in Kingston Education Group.

The New Westminster-based Kingston group operates Lansbridge University, a private college with branches in Chan's Richmond riding and another in New Brunswick. It also operates home-stay, high school programs for Chinese students in Burnaby, Markham and Niagara Falls, Ont.

In China, Chan toured Beijing University with Lo and Tin and was there for the signing of a contract between Beijing University and the Kingston group to offer joint on-line Master of Business Administration courses.

The Kingston group also signed a letter of intent with Shanghai Sibio Polytechnic College to promote academic cooperation and exchange.

At the time, Lansbridge was not allowed to call itself a university in B.C. However, a B.C. ministerial order in June granted it the right to use the word "university" in its name.

A photo from the Team Canada trip of Chan, Lo and Chi Huisheng, vice-chair of Beijing University, is prominently displayed on the Kingston website along with a photo of the company's 2004 Christmas party where Chan gave a speech along with Liberal MLA Patrick Wong.

(Lots of other politicians joined in for the karaoke and lucky draws -- former Liberal MP Sophia Leung, MLAs Patty Sahota, John Nuraney, Richard Lee, Vancouver city councillor Raymond Louie, and Bill Cunningham, the senior adviser to the Liberal government in Ottawa.)

The China photo is just below a press release about Kingston's new high school program in Nanjing, with the first graduates being awarded their Dogwood Certificates. This is the school formerly known as Greenwood Academy, the only B.C.-accredited school in Nanjing.

In March 2005, Lo and Tin renamed one of their numbered companies Grand Canadian Academy (China) Inc.

So when did they buy into the school? That's not clear, since Chan never disclosed to the ethics commissioner who owned the other 30 per cent of the school. And the B.C. government's Independent School Inspector's office still lists Chan's company as the owner.

There's also another messy bit. Patrick Chun, Chan's original partner in the school, wrote to Ethics Commissioner Bernard Shapiro in February and provided him with documents that show him -- Chun -- as owning 40 per cent of the school and asked him to investigate.

Shapiro declined, saying it was a private legal matter and did not fall within his jurisdiction.

But perhaps Shapiro should reconsider.

People who donate to political parties don't expect their money to end up in the candidate's bank account -- personal or corporate.

And taxpayers, who foot a large part of the bill for trade missions, don't expect cabinet ministers to be furthering their own personal interests overseas.

But in these waiting days before Justice John Gomery reports on the millions of dollars misspent on advertising contracts in Quebec, a few thousand bucks here or there to the folks in Ottawa might just seem like chump change.

And the sad truth may very well be that this is the way the game is played in Canada.

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