

## Ottawa Tried to Block Data On Ad Deals

Article by Daniel Leblanc. The Toronto Globe and Mail, 24 November 2004

OTTAWA -- Senior federal officials tried in 2000 to block release to The Globe and Mail of information on millions of dollars in sponsorship deals that are now at the centre of allegations of misspending and fraud, the Gomery inquiry heard yesterday. Public Works bureaucrat Anita Lloyd testified that she had to fight to disclose all of the appropriate information to The Globe, at one point telling her superior that she would not sign off on the release of the expurgated information. "I thought it wasn't legal, and I thought it wasn't ethical," she told Mr. Justice John Gomery yesterday. Ms. Lloyd said her direct superior, Dominique Francoeur, ordered her to release the censored documents. However, Ms. Lloyd said she understood that more senior officials were behind the directive. After she threatened not to sign off on the matter, Ms. Lloyd said, Public Works officials relented and allowed all appropriate information to be released.

Had Ms. Lloyd lost her fight, information on files such as a \$550,000 contract to Groupaction Marketing -- for which no proof of work has ever been found and which is now at the centre of RCMP fraud charges -- would likely never have come to light. Because of Ms. Lloyd's stand, The Globe received complete lists of hundreds of events that had received sponsorship funds from 1997 to 2000 under the Access to Information Act. That list was prepared by Public Works shortly after the department received The Globe's request, and it was almost sent out with no changes. Unnamed officials, however, intervened to prepare an edited list of events that lacked any information on more than \$10-million in deals.

Ms. Lloyd said that she recently came to understand that the edited information included the sponsorship deals that have come under the scrutiny of the RCMP and the Office of the Auditor-General. "The problematic areas were in the entries or rows that were removed," Ms. Lloyd said. Ms. Lloyd's superior, Ms. Francoeur, later told Judge Gomery that the edited information was related to "more sensitive" sponsorship deals. For example, the edited list did not contain any information on the \$550,000 deal known as *Analyse reliée au programme de visibilité du gouvernement du Canada*. That deal, handled by Groupaction, was the subject of a subsequent access request by The Globe, which revealed in 2002 that there was no information on file at Public Works to show that any work was done as part of the contract. The matter was then investigated by the Auditor-General, whose office referred it to the RCMP.

Earlier this year, the RCMP charged the president of Groupaction, Jean Brault, and retired bureaucrat Chuck Guité with fraud in relation to that contract. Ms. Francoeur said there was also concern within the government about releasing information on a project known as Attractions Canada, which was handled by advertising agency Groupe Everest. Over time, Attractions Canada received \$27-million in funding out of the sponsorship program. In addition, the edited list of sponsorship deals did not include the names of the advertising agencies that handled individual sponsorship deals in exchange for a 12-per-cent commission. Without that information on the list, it would have been impossible to see that two Liberal-friendly agencies, Groupaction and Groupe Everest, received the majority of the work from Public Works to oversee sponsorship deals starting in 1997.

The Access to Information Act compels federal officials to release information unless specific exemptions apply. Neither Ms. Lloyd or Ms. Francoeur could tell Judge Gomery exactly who had opposed the release of the first list. Ms. Francoeur said that the deputy minister of public works, Ran Quail, had always favoured the release of the complete list. Ms. Francoeur added that she was unaware of any opposition in the office of then minister Alfonso Gagliano to the release of the full list.

Still, Ms. Francoeur said there were discussions among senior bureaucratic officials in 2000 that Mr. Gagliano could sign off on the release of the documents instead of Ms. Lloyd. Ms. Francoeur said it was felt that this could raise the suspicion of *The Globe*, and that the full list should be sent under Ms. Lloyd's signature. Ms. Lloyd told Judge Gomery that within two weeks of the request being submitted to Public Works in January 2000, senior officials began monitoring the file, which she said was unprecedented. There was almost no media attention on the sponsorship program at the time, but the department was on high alert because of mismanagement problems at Human Resources Development Canada. Ms. Lloyd said she was instructed at one point to call *The Globe* and try to get the reporter requesting the information to accept the disclosure of the edited list of events, but that she refused. "That person, in my view, would have been misled," she said. Ms. Lloyd said she consulted a lawyer on three occasions to get proper backing for her stand, given she had never been in such a situation. "We were being told to not do our job," she said. Ms. Lloyd recently won a prize for ethics at Public Works.

Project list.

Here is a sample of the sponsorship deals that would have been omitted from a tally prepared in response to a *Globe and Mail* Access to Information request, if it had not been for the objections of Public Works bureaucrat Anita Lloyd:

Almanach-Publicité: \$38,025 (Groupaction/Gosselin Communications)

2000 Olympics, advance planning: \$250,000 (Compass Communications)

Attractions Canada: \$4,300,000 (Groupe Everest)

China Project: \$3,000,000 (Vickers and Benson Advertising)

Divers Promo: \$553,439 (Groupaction/Gosselin Communications)

Encyclopédia du Canada: \$1,380,000 (Lafleur Communication & Marketing)

Items promotionnels: \$461,847 (Groupe Everest)

Analyse reliéau programme de visibilité du gouvernement du Canada: \$550,000 (Groupaction)

Source: Gomery inquiry