



Written by [C. Mitchell Shaw](#) on October 17, 2015

## Trial of Paul Staffers Highlights Selective Enforcement of Campaign Laws

Ronald Reagan once famously quipped, “It has been said that politics is the second oldest profession. I have learned that it bears a striking resemblance to the first.” The federal prosecution of staffers involved in Ron Paul’s 2012 bid for the presidency seems to illustrate that.



The former congressman from Texas has stated that the prosecution is politically motivated. Is anyone really surprised? What happened — and if the prosecution is correct, it was bad — actually occurs frequently. The difference here is the selective prosecution for political reasons.

Federal prosecutors have alleged that during Dr. Paul’s 2012 presidential campaign, three men high up in his organization — Jesse Benton (shown with Ron Paul), John Tate, and Dimitri Kesari — secretly paid (read: bribed) an Iowa state senator to switch his endorsement from Michele Bachmann to Ron Paul shortly before the Iowa caucuses, thus giving his campaign a boost. If they did so, as e-mails seemingly indicate, then they may have violated federal financial disclosure laws.

Unfortunately, such actions seem fairly commonplace in politics. In fact, that same Iowa politician, Kent Sorensen, admitted that he had previously been paid to endorse Michele Bachmann before he was paid to drop her and endorse Ron Paul. As the *Des Moines Register* [reported](#):

Sorensen has admitted he also received payments from Bachmann’s campaign. Government prosecutors said an investigation is ongoing but “that investigation presents very different factual and legal issues from the investigation that led to this indictment.”

Since Sorensen has admitted that he accepted payment for his endorsement of Bachmann, what are the “very different factual and legal issues” that cause the feds to prosecute in one case and not the other? Ron Paul says it is the fact that his son is running for the Republican nomination for the 2016 presidential race.

[Truthinmedia.com](#) noted:

Prosecutors announced the indictments against Benton and Kesari just one day before the first Republican debate where Rand was set to take stage. At the time, Benton was heading up a Super PAC (political action committee) working on behalf of Rand Paul’s presidential race. The indictments made headlines across the country.

When the indictments were announced on August 5, Ron Paul was quoted as saying, “I don’t consider that a coincidence; I consider that more than seeking justice.”

All other things seeming to be equal, he is probably on to something.



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This case is convoluted by the fact that legality and morality are often not the same thing. In fact, as 17th century French economist Frédéric Bastiat wrote, they are sometimes at odds with each other. In his seminal work, *The Law*, Bastiat observed, “When law and morality contradict each other, the citizen has the cruel alternative of either losing his moral sense or losing his respect for the law.” In the case of Ron Paul’s 2012 candidacy, the actions of the three men in his campaign who have been accused of these crimes may or may not have actually violated federal law. If the allegations are true, though, they certainly violated the principles of morality.

The three men were indicted by a grand jury in July on charges that they paid Sorenson \$73,000 for his endorsement. According to the *Des Moines Register*:

Sorenson had endorsed Bachmann in the spring of 2011 and was her Iowa campaign chairman. The Paul campaign operatives’ emails from October, November and December 2011 obtained by the FBI show the men aggressively pursued Sorenson to abandon Bachmann for Paul with promises of paying him \$8,000 a month, which the government says Benton referred to in one email as the “fair market value.” Sorenson was paid a total of \$73,000.

E-mail correspondence shows that the men hid the payments by recording them as campaign “audio/visual expenses” to a film production company.

They said Sorenson’s job as a subcontractor is common in campaigns and the law doesn’t require disclosure of payments to subcontractors. They claim the government is targeting only them, pointing out that Sorenson also was secretly paid by Bachmann’s campaign, yet none of her staffers face prosecution.

All the charges against John Tate and most of the charges against Jesse Benton were dropped recently, leaving Dimitri Kesari to face the lion’s share of the charges. Ron Paul was called as a witness for the prosecution — a difficult situation for him in that Benton is married to Paul’s granddaughter — and testified on Wednesday in an Iowa courthouse.

U.S. Department of Justice prosecutor Richard Pilger opened the case against the two Paul staffers by stating that Ron Paul — who by all accounts was unaware of the scheme to pay for Sorenson’s endorsement — was a victim of the defendants’ actions. Dr. Paul, who did not speak to reporters when appearing at the trial, testified that he did not know about the payments to Sorenson and would not have approved them if he had known. He did state, though, that he did not “feel victimized” by his staffers or their actions:

Maybe that attitude will change, but right now I don’t feel victimized. I’m not testifying for the defense; I’m testifying to the prosecution. And that’s been a heavy burden for my family.

The circus that this trial has become is focusing on who knew what and when they knew it, rather than on whether the law is equally applied. Sorenson admitted he was paid for endorsing Bachmann and that he was then paid to doublecross her and endorse Paul. He has cooperated with prosecutors as part of a plea deal.

No one from Bachmann’s campaign has been charged, putting on display the selective application of federal campaign laws by those who hold the reins of power. But this should not be surprising, considering that IRS and other regulations have also been applied selectively to punish political adversaries.

*Photo of Jesse Benton with Ron Paul: AP Images*



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