

<http://www.greatfalltribune.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080409/NEWS01/80409020/1002>

Conrad Burns registers as lobbyist

By MARY CLARE JALONICK
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — Former Sen. Conrad Burns has registered as a lobbyist, working for a group that supports the slaughter of wild horses.

Burns registered with the Senate as a lobbyist for the American Quarter Horse Association Feb. 7, just a few weeks after he became eligible to lobby under Senate rules.

He left the Senate in January 2007 after he was narrowly defeated by Democrat Jon Tester, and former members are not allowed to lobby for one year after their departure. New ethics rules have expanded that period to two years.

The issue of wild horse slaughter was important to Burns, a Republican, while he was in the Senate.

In 2004, he authored a law that would give the Bureau of Land Management expanded authority to sell the oldest wild horses and reduce what the government and ranchers says is an overpopulation of horses on the range. Since then, some lawmakers and animal rights groups have pushed to ban the practice.

In a statement Wednesday, Burns said he is working on behalf of the organization because he strongly believes that "current proposals before Congress are being advocated by those who don't have a full understanding of agriculture and the negative impact proposed changes would have upon an industry that prides itself in the humane treatment of their horses."

"The American Quarter Horse Association is the premier advocacy group on this issue and someone I have worked with for many, many years and I am honored to be able to continue that working relationship today," he said.

Burns' relationships with lobbyists were a key issue in his campaign against Tester. He was part of a Department of Justice investigation of jailed lobbyist Jack Abramoff during the campaign, and Democrats used the issue against him. In January, the government said Burns was no longer part of the probe.

Abramoff is the key figure in a corruption investigation that has led to convictions of a former congressman, legislative aides, lobbyists and officials in the Bush administration. Burns had accepted about \$150,000 in contributions from Abramoff, his clients and associates. He later gave that money away.

One of Burns' former staffers, Ryan Thomas, registered with Burns to lobby for the horse group. Thomas was also associated with Abramoff and flew to the 2001 Super Bowl on Abramoff's corporate jet, according to a 2005 Washington Post report.

Burns works for Gage LLC, a lobbying firm founded by his former chief of staff Leo A. Giacometto.