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Saturday, November 07, 2009

## Consider the Source: Scarantino Busted on Exaggerated Claims on Danish Spending



I've held back on discussing this week's wingnuttery [attacks](#) by James Scarantino -- who writes for a blog paid for by the right-wing [Rio Grande Foundation](#) -- on Lt. Governor [Diane](#)

[Denish](#). Scarantino asserted in a post this week that Denish had misused \$225,000 in funds allocated to her by Governor Bill Richardson. The money was part of funding provided to the state via a [bill](#) signed in 2003 by President George Bush that cut taxes and provided some "stimulus" cash. Scarantino failed to provide any info on the rules that governed how the funding was to be used, but he made a number of dubious claims anyway suggesting the money had been misspent by Denish.

The fact of the matter is that the money came with no well-defined rules about how it was to be spent by the states, with the GAO [stating](#) the funds were "generally ... unrestricted in nature." Basically, it was money provided to the states to use as they wished. Period.

Governor Richardson passed along \$225,000 of the total to Lt. Gov. Denish and it appears to have been used primarily to promote her work to improve conditions for New Mexico's children -- including a poll to study attitudes about children and the formation of a Children's Cabinet. The "PR" that Scarantino claims was for the benefit of Denish was used to pump up the LG's work on behalf of children -- many of whom suffer severely from the negative effects of poverty -- as well as a small amount of organizational work related to a public Christmas event that included homeless children.

Scarantino apparently considers this a waste of taxpayer money -- pretty much how he and his cohorts at the Rio Grande Foundation consider ANY use of taxes for the common good. There's a good reason they're known as the "I've got mine" brigade.

(OpenCongress)

Indigenous Uranium Forum  
Denounces Mining, Militarization,  
and Hate Crimes in Indian Country  
(CIP Americas Program)

Area Groups Skipping Out on Audits  
(Kate Nash, Santa Fe New Mexican)

ConservativeTransparency.org:  
Peeling Off Conservatives'  
AstroTurf Mask (HuffPo)

Hark! The Voters Speak! (Gail  
Collins, NY Times)

Strong Public Option a Cure for  
System (Rep. Raul Grijalva,  
Politico)

What Obama Is Up Against with the  
CIA & Pentagon (Russ Baker,  
Truthout)

Mixer: Obama "Zero Help" on  
Maine (Advocate.com)

Photographer Collection: David  
Guttenfelder in Afghanistan Photos  
(Denver Post)

Santa Fe Gets Green Light for Solar  
Power Deal (Santa Fe New Mexican)

Will Any States Actually Opt Out of  
the Public Plan? (Ezra Klein, WaPo)

Why Does Joe Lieberman Oppose  
Healthcare Reform? Ask His Wife  
(Joe Conason, Salon)

The High Drama Behind Reid's  
Public Option Decision (TPMDC)

Reid: Public Option No 'Silver  
Bullet' But Strong Consensus For  
Opt-Out (TPMDC)

Victims of the Pacific Trash Gyre  
(Reuters Blog)

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MELINDA BURNS - Nov 9,  
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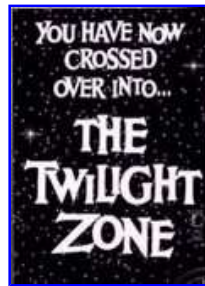
ABC NEWS - by RICHARD  
ESPOSITO, MATTHEW COLE,

## Viral Spread

Scarantino's claims were picked up by a number of local political blogs, as well as the *Santa Fe New Mexican*, *Albuquerque Journal* and two TV news outlets, and presented with little or no fact checking on whether the claims had any basis in reality. Republicans -- including gubernatorial candidate [Susana Martinez](#), GOP Chairman and oil man [Harvey Yates, Jr.](#) and former Rep. [Heather Wilson](#) - seized on Scarantino's assertions and issued exclamation point press releases ravaging Denish for her supposed misdeeds. Gubernatorial candidate [Allen Weh](#) went so far as to call a press conference -- dutifully attended and reported on by many in the media -- alleging that Denish may have acted illegally and calling for investigations by the State Auditor, the State Attorney General and the U.S. Attorney General. Heavy-duty stuff. A regular pile on.

## Reality Impaired

The only problem? Scarantino's "research" on the matter was more than a little compromised by his yearning to attack Denish and the Democrats for heinous acts, and draw attention to himself and the *New Mexico Watchdog* website. He definitely got the attention. Big splash by the guy known for claiming that Rep. Martin Heinrich hangs out with "eco-terrorists," yelling "[Heil!](#)" in response to cheers at an Obama rally and explaining how progressives -- and progressive legislation like domestic partnership bills -- are really, truly, I'm not kidding you, [FASCIST](#) in nature. (Scarantino likes to paraphrase the paranoid, fact-challenged scribbblings of [Jonah Goldberg](#) -- right-wing dissembler supreme.)



When Scarantino or others of his ilk publish scurrilous tracts that seek to promote right-wing echo chamber talking points, it's always tempting to jump in quickly and smack them down. It's usually very easy. The quandary is that, in order to criticize the claims, one has to call attention to them and thus provide them with greater exposure -- just what the culprits wanted in the first place.

In this case, I knew that Scarantino's charges were very likely trumped up and full of distortions and exaggerations. Like anyone knowledgeable about the way in which the right-wing echo chamber operates, I'm careful to **CONSIDER THE SOURCE** before taking accusations and allegations seriously. And if the source is Fox News or Glenn Beck or Rush Limbaugh or Karl Rove or James Scarantino -- in all probability "there is no there there," as Gertrude Stein once said. (Aside: Ms. Stein also wrote that "a



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THE POLITICO - by GLENN THRUSH, MEREDITH SHINER - Nov 9, 2009  
3.3 | Like

**Making Health Care Better**

NEW YORK TIMES - by DAVID LEONHARDT - Nov 8, 2009  
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NEW REPUBLIC - by JONATHAN COHN - Nov 8, 2009  
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[NPR: The Obama Tracker](#)

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[Organizing for America](#)

[Track Confirmation of Obama's Cabinet Nominees \(CQ Politics\)](#)

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[Engage! Volunteer! \(Santa Fe\)](#)

[Environmental News for New Mexicans \(Laura Paskus\)](#)

[FarrFeed \(Taos\)](#)

[Female New Mexican's Political Point of View](#)

rose is a rose." This, too, applies as "a Scarantino accusation is a Scarantino accusation," and most people with a working truth-meter in their brains immediately smell a rat.)

So, anyway, I decided to sit back and watch the media furor develop. I'm no journalist (neither is Scarantino) and I certainly possess neither the training nor the time to obtain and study all the documents that would be useful in determining the efficacy of Scarantino's assertions. But I had a hunch someone else would.

**Just the Facts**

Voila! Local reporter-blogger **Heath Haussamen** took a couple days to study the documents related to the claims by Scarantino and published an article with the title, "[Denish stimulus spending: What's the big deal?](#)" In other words, Scarantino's post is much ado about nothing.

**Bottom line:** Definitely read Haussamen's entire piece, but I think this is one of his money graphs:

Though I'm not certain at all, I think it's still possible there was a little mixing here, with a very small amount of public money. But my question, then, is this: If Republicans want to complain about the possibility that a Danish staffer might have been paid with public money for a few hours of work related to a Christmas card, do they also have a problem with the calendar hanging above my desk and paid for by taxpayers that former U.S. Sen. Pete Domenici, R-N.M., mailed me (also with taxpayer money) last year just before he retired?

Scarantino also suggested that the Lt. Governor's work on behalf of children and others was unconstitutional:

Under the New Mexico State Constitution, the only powers and duties given to the Lt. Governor are to serve as president of the State Senate, cast a vote in cases of a tie and to succeed to the office of Governor in the case of death, incapacity or removal. Unlike other executive officers, the state constitution does not even require the Lt. Governor to keep public records, books, papers or seals of public office.

As is his habit, Scarantino omitted any references that might rebut his views. In fact, state law significantly expands the role of the LG beyond the definition in the Constitution. As Thomas Cole [wrote](#) in his UpFront column in the *Albuquerque Journal* today,

Food Museum Blog (nee Foodies for Dean)

Forgotten Albuquerque

Grassroots Press (Las Cruces)

Green Chile Chatter (Kate Nash)

Heath Haussamen (Las Cruces)

Jfleck at Inkstain

Jornado del Muerto: Life in New Mexico and other attractions

Just New Mexico

La Politica: New Mexico!

Live From Silver City

Local Dialogue ... New Mexico

m-pyre

Mario Burgos

mjh's Blog

My Strange New Mexico

New Mexico Independent

New West | ABQ / Santa Fe

NM FBIHOP (A Community Blog)

Only in New Mexico (Jim Baca)

Poor Kenneth, An Almanack

Progressive Change New Mexico

Raging Granny Rag

Roundhouse Roundup: The Blog (Steve Terrell)

Senator Dede Feldman's Blog

SFReeper

Sheriff Greg Solano Blog (Santa Fe)

SWOPblogger

Tag End (Jim Belshaw)

The Blue Voice (At least one of them is in NM)

The Zees Go West

What Do I Know? (NM's Most Distinguished Blogger Abroad)

What's the Word? (Peter St. Cyr)

What's Wrong With This Picture? (M.G. Bralley)

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... state laws impose additional duties and give the lieutenant governor ... wide discretion in shaping the job.

The lieutenant governor is a mandated member of the state Board of Finance, the Children's Cabinet, the Military Base Planning Commission, the Spaceport Authority, the Border Authority, the Community Development Council and the Mortgage Finance Authority.

State law also requires the lieutenant governor to "facilitate and promote the cooperation and understanding between the people of this state and the agencies of state government" and to "perform any other duties that may from time to time be assigned him by the governor."

### More to Come

As I said earlier, there is "no there there" in Scarantino's recent attack on Denish. But that's apparently not going to stop him from continuing to selectively serve up documents to instigate clearly partisan smears that match the political strategies of the right-wing attack dogs. The 2010 election cycle version of the notorious Swiftboat brigades will be brutal indeed. Haussamen's post included a Scarantino statement defining how he sees his mission at *New Mexico Watchdog*:

"Please understand my role as New Mexico Watchdog," he wrote in an e-mail. "Most of what I will do is dig through voluminous records and report on what's there, something that too few people have the time or wherewithal to do. I then report on what is in the records."

"I hope my work serves as a resource to enable professional and citizen journalists to dig deeper, which seems to be the case in this matter," he wrote.

Right. He's just performing public-service research and leaving the conclusions to others. His work just happens to serve the political needs of Weh et al. Anyone have a guess on how much Scarantino will delve into the use of funds from federal contracting -- a lot of it related to Iraq -- of Allen Weh's [CSI Aviation Services](#)? Or into how Susana Martinez spent her prosecutor funds? Or into the kind of clients served by PR maven Doug Turner's company? Or into what actually happened between Republican land commissioner Pat Lyons and Las Cruces developer Philip Philippou on those land leases? I'm sure we'll got lots of "fair and balanced" -- at least the Fox News version of "fair and balanced."



**D E M O C R A T I C  
P A R T Y**

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- 2008 Dem National Convention Delegation: NM
- Bernalillo County Democratic Party
- DCCC
- Democratic Governors Association
- Democratic Party of NM BLOG
- Democratic Party of NM
- Democratic Party of NM Platform, Rules
- Democratic Women of New Mexico
- Democrats for the West
- DLCC
- DNC
- DNC 50-State Strategy
- DNC Charter, Bylaws
- DNC: Kicking Ass Blog
- DPNM Committee Assignments, 2007-09
- DPNM State Central Committee List 2007-09
- DSCC
- NM County Dem Parties
- NM Democratic Club of Sandoval County
- US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi
- US Senate Democrats

**L O C A L   A C T I V I S M**

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- ABQ Peace and Justice Center
- ACLU NM
- Americans for Hemp NM
- Center for Civic Policy
- Citizen Action
- Common Cause New Mexico

**GOP Tea Party on Steroids**

Obviously, Scarantino will concentrate on providing new fodder for the right-wing spin machine as the politics of the 2010 election cycle heat up. He'll have plenty of company and support. The national focus of the Republican Party and conservative "movement" has degenerated into a Tea Party cum Fox News cum Glenn Beck cum Rush Limbaugh cum Michelle Bachmann hate fest. They're all of a piece in pushing a "patriot" revolution made necessary by the election of a secretly Muslim, foreign-born president planted here to bring down the good ole' boy US of A and install a fascist-Communist-socialist dictatorship. It's all they have.



When your only current policy position is NO -- and the governing philosophies of your bunch were almost entirely responsible for creating the worst economic cataclysm since the Great Depression, getting us into two quagmires and pretty much demolishing the middle class -- the only thing you've got left is trying to undermine the opposition without any regard to the truth. And there's a lot of right-wing money that will be used to support that effort. There always is.

For instance, *New Mexico Watchdog* is already accompanied by blogs using the Watchdog name, artwork and focus in other states including Kansas, Nebraska, New Hampshire, Ohio, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and West Virginia, with more to come across the nation. It's not clear who's funding the effort, but we know that the Rio Grande Foundation has in the past received funds from the Cato Institute. No doubt they'll be pulling "donations" from the well-established and growing Swiftboat-Richard Scaife-Cato Institute-Heritage Foundation network that works to discredit anything left of Atila the Hun.



Clearly, Scarantino and the Rio Grande Foundation crew intend to bury us with biased research and revelations culled from digging deep into any and all paperwork that might

be mined for smears and innuendo against Democrats. Let's hope that next time the media will delve a little deeper into the facts before helping to create a viral dissemination of what amounts to typical right-wing spin attacks. As for me, I intend to give Scarantino's future chicken scratching as wide a berth as possible. I don't have to read his stuff to know which way the wind blows in right-wing land, or to judge whether he's being fair or not. I already know. He pretends to be nonpartisan, but he's on a mission to discredit Dems and he obviously intends to do so regardless of the facts. What more do we need to know?

Equality New Mexico  
Global Dialog Project, SantaFe  
Health Action New Mexico  
Health Care Not Health Insurance  
League of Women Voters of Central NM  
Los Alamos Study Group  
NARAL Pro-Choice NM  
New Mexico PIRG  
NM Media Literacy Project  
NM Wilderness Alliance  
NOW Chapters NM  
Nuclear Watch of New Mexico  
SAGE Council  
San Juan Peace Coalition  
Sierra Club NM  
Socorro News - Progressive News  
Stop the War Machine  
Veterans for Peace-ABQ

NEWS , VIEWS

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American Prospect Online  
Another Pundit is Possible  
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[The Jed Report](#)  
[The Mahablog](#)  
[The New Civil Rights Movement | A Journal Of News & Opinion On Gay Marriage & Gay Rights](#)  
[The Political Carnival \(Cliff Schechter\)](#)  
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[The Red State \(Texas\)](#)  
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[Stonewall Democrats](#)

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Wild Earth Guardians

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