



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on September 1, 2011

## Liberal House Member Being Investigated by Liberal Watchdog Group

Rep. Laura Richardson (D-Calif., left) used her congressional office funds to pay for a fancy \$20,000 luncheon for some of her constituents in May, calling it a “briefing” to get around House rules prohibiting such expenditures. Jay’s Catering handled the details of the party complete with singing, dancing, and “special consideration of [guests’] dietary and medical needs.” Chris Kuhles, catering manager, said “It was a Polynesian-themed event ? Huli Huli Chicken, fried rice, green salad, Hawaiian sweet rolls [and} for dessert, truffle cake.”



It was all according to Hoyle, said Richardson’s spokesman Ray Zaccaro: “All expenses associated with the event were in keeping with the rules and standards of the House Members Representational Account (MRA).” However, a close look [at those rules](#) showed that Richardson’s “briefing” violated at least three of the MRA rules including these:

- The MRA may not be used for any expenses related to activities or events which are primarily social in nature

- The MRA may not pay for campaign expenses

- The MRA may not pay for political expenses

This is when Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW) entered the picture. Melanie Sloan, executive director for the watchdog organization, said “There is a ban on using [MRA] money for social events, and this sounds remarkably like a social event. The thing about the MRA is it has to be used for official purposes...She’s repeatedly been very lax with the rules and has made it perfectly clear that she just doesn’t care. Her behavior continues to come close to or cross the line.”

Two months ago Melanie and her CREW asked the FBI to investigate whether Richardson was in violation of the [Hatch Act](#) which prohibits federal employees from engaging in partisan political activities. Sloan said that Richardson “forced staff members to perform campaign and personal work at taxpayer expense.” The particular event that pushed CREW to ask the FBI to get involved occurred last fall at a campaign fundraiser Richardson sponsored called a “Democratic Idol Fundraiser” which she required all of her staff and spouses to attend and to wear Richardson’s campaign shirts. Emails to her staff were produced stating flatly that “All staff are required to attend Ms. Richardson’s event. Bring spouses and tell interns they have to be there as well.”

One of those staff members, Maria Angel Macias, resigned in March of this year, protesting not only the violations but Richardson’s abusive behavior as well, which subjected her to “constant verbal and emotional abuse.” Said Macias:

- She would just ask me to call [staff members] and tell them to come to the campaign office. She



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would ask me to schedule people (staff members and drivers to accompany Richardson) for campaign fundraisers for other elected officials.

According to the complaint filed by CREW, “Some of her staff...reported that prior to the 2010 election, the congresswoman forced them ‘under threat of termination’ to work on her reelection campaign each weekday evening from 6:00 to 9:00p.m. and on weekends from 9:00a.m. to 8:00p.m.” In addition her staff was required to make financial contributions to her campaign. Sloane [said](#) that “Richardson was vicious to her staff. She went through a lot of members.”

What is surprising is that CREW usually focuses on misdeeds by Republicans. [Characterized](#) variously as “liberal”, “left-leaning”, “Democratic-leaning” and “progressive” and funded in 2003 by such entities as George Soros’ Open Society Institute, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and the Gill Foundation, CREW is, according to Ben Smith of Politico, “one of a wave of new groups backed by liberal donors [as] a vehicle for assaults on largely...Republican targets.” But Richardson’s behaviors have been so outrageous (she is also [under investigation](#) by the House Ethics Committee) that CREW simply had to respond.



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