



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on June 3, 2010

White House Tried to Lure Challenger Out of Colorado Race

President Obama wanted to "avoid a costly battle between two supporters" in a Democratic Senate primary in Colorado, and a White House official called on one of them to see if he might be interested in a federal job instead of a Senate race, ABC News reported today. But no job was offered, both the White House and the candidate said.



Former Speaker of the Colorado House of Representatives Andrew Romanoff, who is challenging Senator Michael Bennet in the August primary, said Jim Messina, Deputy Chief of Staff to the President, called him last September and discussed possible administration jobs he might be interested in should he decide not to run for the Senate. According to an e-mail from Messina, released by Romanoff Wednesday night, the available positions included Deputy Assistant Administrator for Latin America and the Caribbean and Director of the Office of Democracy and Governance, both with the U.S. Agency for International Development; and Director of the U.S. Trade and Development Agency.

"I informed Mr. Messina that I had made my decision to run," Romanoff said in a written release. Messina told him he could not guarantee him appointment to any of the positions he mentioned, Romanoff said, adding: "At no time was I promised a job, nor did I request Mr. Messina's assistance in obtaining one."

White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs issued a statement Thursday morning acknowledging that Messina had contacted Romanoff about the job opportunities. "Months earlier, the President had endorsed Senator Michael Bennet for the Colorado seat, and Messina wanted to determine if it was possible to avoid a costly battle between two supporters," Gibbs said. Gibbs also said Romanoff had "applied for a position at USAID during the Presidential transition" that followed Obama's victory in the 2008 election. Romanoff "filed this application through the Transition on-line process," Gibbs said. "After the new administration took office, he followed up by phone with White House personnel." Messina called and e-mailed Romanoff last September "to see if he was still interested in a position at USAID, or if, as had been reported, he was running for the US Senate," said Gibbs.

Bennet was appointed last year to the Senate seat held by Ken Salazar, who resigned to become



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Secretary of the Interior in the new administration. A recent Public Policy Polling survey shows Bennet leading Romanoff 46 to 31 percent in the August 10 primary contest.

Michael Riley of the *Denver Post* reported last September that Messina "suggested a place for Romanoff might be found in the administration and offered specific suggestions, according to several sources." Riley said the "overture" included "mention of a job at the USAID, the foreign aid agency." Romanoff said he refused to comment about the matter at the time "because I did not want — and do not want — to politicize this matter." He issued his statement Wednesday night because a "great deal of misinformation has filled the void in the meantime," he said.

This is the second time the White House has had to deal with news that federal jobs were discussed in an effort to lure potential opponents away from races against candidates backed by the President. Earlier this year, Congressman Joe Sestak said he had been offered a high-ranking federal job if he decided not to run against five-term incumbent Sen. Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania. Specter won Obama's endorsement when he switched from Republican to Democrat last year to avoid what appeared to be a losing Republican primary battle against conservative former Congressman Patrick Toomey, who nearly upset Specter in the 2004 primary. Specter apparently was not anticipating a strong challenge from a Democratic opponent when he said, "My change in parties will enable me to be reelected." But Sestak beat him handily in the May 18 primary and will face Toomey in November.

Last week, the White House released an internal report from White House counsel Bob Bauer stating that former President Bill Clinton had offered Sestak a non-paying advisory job at the request of Obama's Chief of Staff, Rahm Emanuel. While the White House insists nothing inappropriate was offered, Republicans are demanding more information about apparent efforts to use appointive positions to protect favored candidates from contested primaries. Last week Congressman Darrell Issa (D-Calif.) called for the appointment of a special prosecutor to look into possible violations of federal law.

Photo of Andrew Romanoff: AP Images



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