

## Let's Be Frank by Dan Jacoby

I got something disturbing in my mailbox the other day.

On its surface, it was another one of those mailings that elected officials send out all the time. They purport to “inform” their constituents, but in reality they’re just shilling for themselves, praising their own efforts to accomplish ... well, just about everything, whether they’ve accomplished anything or not. They can do this because of what is known as the “franking privilege”. This means that they can send all this mail without having to pay for it. (The term “franking” comes from the Latin word *francus*, meaning free. Of course, it’s only free for elected officials; our taxes pay for it.)

The disturbing thing about this mailing is that, while the mailing came from my City Council representative, it was clearly an advertisement not for my representative, but for a candidate for Mayor. It turns out that this Mayoral candidate is using a relationship with several City Council members to get them to send out free advertising.

Is this illegal? Unfortunately, it is not. Is it crooked and sleazy? Absolutely! What’s worse, if this candidate gets the nomination, the current Mayor is certain to publicize his opponent’s sleaziness in order to win re-election.

Four years ago, Mark Green won the Democratic nomination for Mayor by savaging his main opponent. He won the nomination, but lost the election, partly because of his cheap tactics. If the current abuse of the franking privilege helps this Democrat win the nomination, it will certainly help keep Michael Bloomberg in power for another four years.

What’s the answer?

In the long term, significant changes need to be made in the franking privilege. We need to limit how our elected officials can use this privilege – especially since our taxes pay for it. Until that happens, however, we need to do two things. First, we need to be aware of what’s going on. Second, we need to spread the word, and make sure that people don’t vote for candidates who use such cheap, crooked, sleazy tactics.

In short, we need to hold our elected officials to a higher standard. We also need to make sure that we nominate a candidate who already keeps to that higher standard.

And who is the Mayoral candidate in question? It’s Gifford Miller, the current Speaker of the City Council.

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