

Shilling for Malaysia Is Pretty Nice Work If You Can Get It
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Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak, patron of shady journalists

Conservative commentator Joshua Treviño admitted today that he's spent years doing down-low PR work for the government of Malaysia, and received \$389,724.70 for the trouble. Some of that, but not most, was paid to writers who wrote negative pieces about the country's opposition leader for the likes of the Huffington Post, National Review, and RedState. BuzzFeed's Rosie Gray, in a report on the scam this afternoon, picks up where her boss Ben Smith left off. In 2011, Treviño told Smith, "I was never on any 'Malaysian entity's payroll,' and I resent your assumption that I was," which he now admits was a lie. But he's not particularly sorry.

BuzzFeed reports:

Trevino's subcontractors included conservative writer Ben Domenech, who made \$36,000 from the arrangement, and Rachel Ehrenfeld, the director of the American Center for Democracy, who made \$30,000. Seth Mandel, an editor at Commentary, made \$5,500 [...]. Brad Jackson, writing at the time for RedState, made \$24,700. Overall, 10 writers were part of the arrangement.

"It was actually a fairly standard PR operation," Trevino told BuzzFeed Friday. "To be blunt with you, and I think the filing is clear about this, it was a lot looser than a typical PR operation. I wanted to respect these guys' independence and not have them be placement machines."

Russia has worked similar setups, weaseling positive press onto HuffPo and CNBC through shady PR operations under the guise of independent commentary.

In this case, HuffPo has deleted one of the articles about Malaysia in question. An editor's note now reads, "This post was removed from The Huffington Post after it was revealed that the author violated our blogger guidelines by not properly disclosing financial ties that amounted to a serious conflict of interest." (**Update:** "This is a clear violation of HuffPost's blogging policy that requires disclosure of payments and conflicts of interest," said a spokesperson. "As soon as we learned of this conflict, we removed the posts from our site.")

Treviño, whom Glenn Greenwald once called "among the lowliest, most extremist cretins that exist," was hired as a columnist by the U.S. version of the *Guardian* last year, only to be fired before writing anything when his mostly undisclosed ties to Malaysia came up. Back then, he told the *New York Times* that he had finally "made the move into full-time writing," but now works for the Texas Public Policy Foundation.

"I'm not even slightly insulted at being told I'm not a real journalist," Treviño wrote today on Twitter, where he's taking questions about the Malaysian gig. "Feel free, but it ain't a thing here." That's his bank account talking.

Source: <http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2013/03/joshn-trevino-admits-to-shilling-for-malaysia.html>