

Confronting Senator Schumer on his Position on Drones

Report to Upstate Coalition to Ground Drones and End the Wars on a Visit to Charles Schumer's Peekskill Office – February 10, 2015

On the afternoon of February 10, after three snow postponements, Kwame Madden and I met in the Peekskill, NY office of Senator Charles Schumer with Cody Peluso, his Regional Director, and Brandon Graham, a staff assistant.

In addition to providing Cody and Brandon with the ample background information from the Coalition, we gave them a letter to Senator Schumer that listed campaign contributions totaling \$639,300 that he has received between 2009 and 2014 from makers of military drones and from financial firms that are invested in military drone makers. The letter asked the senator to:

“...explain why you accepted these contributions and specifically what you think these firms hope to gain from their support.”

Before getting to Cody's responses to this letter (attached), here is a brief summary of our visit.

The meeting was very cordial. We talked exclusively with Cody; Brandon listened. Cody seemed to take a genuine interest in what we were saying and evinced considerable concern at what we were telling him about the impact of drone attacks on those under surveillance and attack.

He said that in presenting our information to his superiors, one question that would come up is whether it is not true that drones have been effective in countering terrorism. I

responded that if one measures success by whether drone attacks have reduced violence and created a more stable, healthy environment for people in and outside drone attack zones, one can say only that drone war has been a total failure.

Another point he said is also raised is that drones protect U.S. soldiers and save their lives. I told him that the air force is having a hard time keeping drone pilots and that if they felt they were saving lives of their comrades it is hard to believe they would be dropping out of drone piloting. I noted the April 2014 report from the Government Accountability Office describing the problem of drone pilot dropout.

With respect to the campaign finance letter, Cody first said that the companies listed all have a major economic role in New York and hence gave contributions. I responded that if they have this role, it is obvious they are important to the state, and there is no need to contribute. Further, I pointed out that one should not be voting on issues of war and peace and at the same time accepting money from weapons makers and banks deeply invested in weapons makers.

Kwame asked whether or not Senator Schumer has "certain standards on who you take money from." I said this was a key point and one that is faced by religious and other institutions when they decide what investment they will make.

Cody agreed that "the optics of it (the contributions) are an issue."

He said that Senator Schumer had never, in any conversation that he, Cody, had been privy to, said something was being done in relation to a campaign contribution.

I explained to Cody that we definitely wanted a response to the questions in the letter, quoted above, and he said he would let that be known to his bosses.

We intend to follow up on this.

At the end of the meeting, I asked Cody what Senator Schumer's position on drone attacks is.

"He does think they (drones) have a place in our military," he said, and that the senator thinks of President Obama's drone attacks that "some are beneficial and helpful."

He said that the senator had also been an advocate for drone training being done at Hancock air base.

Nevertheless, he said he would carry our message forward.

We provided a great deal more information and perspective than what is noted here, but these are the key points.

ATTACHMENT A

February 5, 2015
Senator Charles Schumer
1 Park Place, Suite 100
Peekskill, New York 10566

Dear Senator Schumer:

In reviewing information provided in OpenSecrets.org, it appears that between 2009 and 2014 you received campaign contributions from military drone manufacturers and financial institutions invested in military drone manufacture, as follows:

Military Drone Manufacture – \$143,900.

- Lockheed \$60,000
- Harris \$45,300
- Carlyle \$38,100

Financial Institutions Invested in Military Drone Manufacture

– \$495,400.

- Lazard \$184,200
- Citi \$98,900
- BlackRock \$77,600
- Goldman \$74,300
- JP Morgan \$60,400

We would appreciate it if you would explain why you accepted these contributions and specifically what you think these firms hope to gain from their support.

Sincerely,

Nick Mottern Kwame Madden

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NOTE TO ORGANIZERS – (The following was not included in Schumer letter.)

In addition to the listing of campaign contributions found at Open Secrets.org, the information in the letter on financial institutions invested in military drone makers is derived from DontBankontheBomb.com

Don't Bank on the Bomb is a very valuable, highly detailed report on which financial institutions are invested in firms that are producing nuclear weapons. Many of these weapons firms, like Honeywell, Lockheed, Boeing and Raytheon are also involved in work on military drones.

Financial institutions will obviously move to protect and enhance their investments, so those with weapons investments are obviously critical players in war politics, and in this

case, drone war politics.
