



topped by an eagle, and a private office “with a drippy crystal chandelier, a table propped up by two eagles, a bust of Abraham Lincoln and massive arrangements of pheasant feathers.”<sup>8</sup> The source of the money for the decorations bought for both his current Rayburn building office and his former Cannon building office, however, is not clear. In 2012, CREW reported Rep. Schock’s campaign had paid \$5,522 to Ms. Brahler’s company for what it described as “office equipment.”<sup>9</sup> Rep. Schock’s chief of staff and campaign manager claimed at the time the campaign bought “used office furniture, not antiques,” leaving it unclear if the furniture was used in his campaign office or his congressional office.<sup>10</sup> Today’s news report strongly suggests Rep. Schock used campaign funds to pay Ms. Brahler’s company for furniture for his Cannon building office, and Rep. Schock also may have used campaign money to pay for the furniture in his new Rayburn building office.

Notably, when Rep. Schock’s staff members learned the *Washington Post* reporter was taking photos of the office and planning to write about it, they asked the reporter to delete the photos from his camera, and tried to dissuade him from writing a story.<sup>11</sup>

House ethics rules clearly prohibit Rep. Schock from accepting Ms. Brahler’s free interior decorating services. Rule 25 of the House rules provides a member “may not knowingly accept a gift except as provided in this clause.”<sup>12</sup> The rules define “gift” broadly to mean any “item having monetary value,” including “gifts of services.”<sup>13</sup> The rules further prohibit using “outside private donations, funds, or in-kind goods or services . . . to support the activities of, or pay the expenses of, a congressional office.”<sup>14</sup> Only funds appropriated for office expenses or a member’s personal funds may be used for these purposes.<sup>15</sup> The House Ethics Manual specifically addresses accepting outside goods or services to decorate a congressional office, providing as an example:

Member E would like to decorate his House office in a modern style of furniture not available from Office Furnishings. E may **not** accept the offer of a furniture store to supply his office with free furniture. E may purchase the furniture of his choice with his own money.<sup>16</sup>

Further, the prohibitions on accepting gifts or outside funds for office expenses unquestionably apply to goods, money, and services. In applying these rules, “no logical

---

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*

<sup>9</sup> Al Kamen, Rep. Aaron Schock Gets Ripped Over Spending, *Washington Post*, May 1, 2012 (attached as Exhibit B).

<sup>10</sup> *Id.*

<sup>11</sup> Terris, *Washington Post*, Feb. 2, 2015.

<sup>12</sup> House Rule 25, cl. 5(a)(1)(A)(i).

<sup>13</sup> House Rule 25, cl. 5(a)(2)(A).

<sup>14</sup> House Comm. on Standards of Official Conduct, House Ethics Manual, at 326 (110th Cong., 2d. Sess., 2008 ed.) (citing House Rule 24).

<sup>15</sup> *Id.*

<sup>16</sup> House Ethics Manual, at 329 (emphasis in original).



distinction can be drawn between the private contribution of in-kind services and the private contribution of money, and . . . both perpetuate the very kind of unofficial office accounts and practices that are prohibited” by House rules.<sup>17</sup> As a result, accepting free interior design services is the same as accepting free furniture and equally barred.

House ethics rules also prohibit members from using campaign funds to pay for furniture used in their congressional offices.<sup>18</sup> As the House Ethics Manual clearly states, furniture is one of the five categories of congressional expenses “that may **not** be paid using campaign funds.”<sup>19</sup>

It appears Rep. Schock violated these rules by accepting Ms. Brahler’s free services. Rep. Schock’s office admitted Ms. Brahler provided free services to design and decorate his current office in the Rayburn building. Ms. Brahler also designed Rep. Schock’s former office in the Cannon building, and may have provided those services without charge. Rep. Schock further violated the rules if he paid for the furniture in either congressional office using campaign funds.

Gifts to members, including private funds used to pay for official expenses, create an appearance of impropriety that may undermine the public’s faith in government, and may provide the opportunity for improperly influencing members.<sup>20</sup> As a result, House rules specifically prohibit members from accepting services like those Ms. Brahler provided to Rep. Schock. OCE should commence an immediate investigation into Rep. Schock’s conduct and forward this matter to the House Ethics Committee for appropriate action.

I am aware that the False Statements Act, 18 U.S.C. § 1001, applies to information submitted to the Office of Congressional Ethics.

Sincerely,



Anne L. Weismann  
Interim Executive Director  
Citizens for Responsibility and  
Ethics in Washington

Encls.

---

<sup>17</sup> House Select Comm. on Ethics, Advisory Opinion No. 6 (May 9, 1977), reprinted in House Ethics Manual, at 362.

<sup>18</sup> House Rule 24, cl. 1(b); House Ethics Manual, at 174, 177; 2 U.S.C. § 59e(d).

<sup>19</sup> House Ethics Manual, at 177 (emphasis in original).

<sup>20</sup> House Ethics Manual, at 24, 327.

# **EXHIBIT A**

# He's got a 'Downton Abbey'-inspired office, but Rep. Aaron Schock won't talk about it.

By Ben Terris February 2 at 10:50 PM

The Rayburn House Office Building is a labyrinth of beige offices.

And then, there's ... Rep. Aaron Schock's new digs.

Bright red walls. A gold-colored wall sconce with black candles. A Federal-style bull's-eye mirror with an eagle perched on top. And this is just the Illinois Republican's outer office.

---

"It's actually based off of the red room in 'Downton Abbey,'" said the woman behind the front desk, comparing it to the luxurious set piece at the heart of the British period drama.

This was a bold room. But the confidence was a mirage. For on Capitol Hill, caution is king when it comes to the micromanagement of one's image, even in the case of how a congressman decides to decorate his office.

And sometimes, a friendly outsider can inadvertently ruin a communications director's day.

A blond woman popped out of an inner office. “Want to see the rest?” she asked.

She introduced herself as Annie Brahler, the interior decorator whose company is called Euro Trash. She guided me to Schock’s private office, revealing another dramatic red room. This one with a drippy crystal chandelier, a table propped up by two eagles, a bust of Abraham Lincoln and massive arrangements of pheasant feathers.

Then, my phone rang.

It was Schock’s communications director, Benjamin Cole.

“Are you taking pictures of the office?” he asked. “Who told you you could do that? ... Okay, stay where you are. You’ve created a bit of a crisis in the office.”

A staff member then came and asked me to please delete the photos from my phone. So started a day of back-and-forths with a congressman’s office about interior design.

Washington has always been more “Veep” than “House of Cards.”

Schock, 33, is one of the rising stars of the Republican Party. He’s young, has six-pack abs that landed him on the cover of Men’s Health and is a prodigious fundraiser. He’s also one of the most media-savvy members of Congress, with an Instagram feed that features him surfing, hiking across glaciers, tangoing on the streets of Buenos Aires and smiling next to duck-faced pop star Ariana Grande.

An office decorated in a unique way would hardly be surprising; it would just be another interesting fact about a congressman who has built a brand as not just another politician.



So why was this a crisis?

“You’ve got a member [of Congress] willing to talk to you about other things,” Cole said on the phone. “Why sour it by rushing to write some gossipy piece?”

The magnitude of this manufactured PR catastrophe seemed to elude Brahler, who lives and operates her business in Illinois. She was happy to discuss her work, saying she didn’t get why the staff acted so “prickly.”

Brahler met the congressman in his district years ago, and he was impressed with her work, which he had seen in magazines. She likes to say that she can turn things ready for the trash heap into something beautiful.

When a member of Congress moves into an office, the bare essentials are provided by the House of Representatives. Furniture and computers are often handed down by other offices. New members are also entitled to a new paint job, although there are only a limited number of available colors — beige, eggshell, light blue, light gray or light yellow — that the House will provide. Additional decorations must come out of the lawmaker’s pocket.

Brahler offered her services for free, according to Schock’s office, although he had to pay for the objects. She had decorated his old office on the fifth floor of the Cannon House Office Building, one of the least desirable pieces of congressional real estate. While his new office takes a bit of inspiration from “Downton Abbey,” it’s not a replica of what’s seen on the PBS hit.

“I guess because he’s fresh-minded and forward-thinking, he’s not hung up on doing things the same way as everyone else,” Brahler said. “It’s gotten to where he’s comfortable with everything I do.”

Except, perhaps, when she gives a tour of his office to a journalist.

“You see, the congressman hasn’t even seen the office yet,” Cole told me later. “Surely, it wouldn’t be fair for you to write about his office until he has the chance to see it.”

I told him if I could be there when Schock first saw the office, I would hold off till then. Cole agreed, and we reached the Red Walls Accord of 2015.

That is, until Schock decided he wasn’t interested in doing a whole story about how his office is decorated.

“He’s happy to talk to you, just not about the office,” Cole said, sounding very tired of the ordeal. “I’m really sorry and want you to know this is not fun for me.”

Cole was back in touch later to add one more piece of information relating to Schock and “Downton Abbey”: “I don’t even know if he watches it; I don’t know what shows he watches. But I don’t think he watches much TV.”

---

Ben Terris is a writer in the Washington Post's Style section with a focus on national politics.

---

## Top 7 Mattresses

[comparestores.net/Mattress](http://comparestores.net/Mattress)

2015 Bestselling Mattresses. Compare Latest Deals & Save Big!

## European Service & Repair



[euromotorservice.com](http://euromotorservice.com)

Free Diagnostic & Brake Inspection Coupons. 20-30% Less Than Dealers!



## **EXHIBIT B**

# Rep. Aaron Schock gets ripped over spending



By **Al Kamen** Columnist May 1, 2012

Appearances matter.

Rep. Aaron Schock seems to understand this better than most members of Congress. After all, his chiseled physique and fashion sense has landed him, shirtless, on the cover of Men's Health and in a photo spread in GQ in which he sported designer suits.

---

Al Kamen, an award-winning columnist on the national staff of The Washington Post, created the "In the Loop" column in 1993. [View Archive](#)

But the looks of his spending from campaign and PAC coffers aren't quite as attractive. The sophomore Republican from Illinois has spent thousands of dollars from his campaign and political action committee on luxury hotels from Palm Beach to Manhattan, town-car service, antique stores and concerts.

That's all perfectly legal: As long as the trips and expenses are legitimately related to campaigning and fundraising, they're fine.

"It's an appearance problem," said **Melanie Sloan**, director of Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, the watchdog group that analyzed Schock's spending. "He seems perfectly happy to live high on the hog as long as someone else is footing the bill."

In the past three election cycles, Schock's campaign and PAC spent \$85,622 on luxury hotels, about half of which were four- and five-star outfits, including the Waldorf Astoria



in Chicago, the famed Breakers in Palm Beach, Fla., and the Beverly Wilshire in Beverly Hills, Calif.

**Steven Shearer**, Schock's chief of staff and campaign manager, says the expenses are merely investments that pay good returns — in the 2010 election cycle that propelled Republicans to the House majority, Schock was a top-10 donor to the National Republican Campaign Committee and to the “Young Guns” PAC, he notes.

To attract donations, Shearer says fundraising events have to stand out. “You can't have the typical cocktail receptions at all the typical places in Washington that everyone has already done.”

CREW says the group first flagged Schock's champagne tastes while scouring House members' financials for a report titled “Family Affair.” In that analysis, they noted that Schock had used campaign funds for a fancy hotel stay in Greece (he later repaid the campaign) and for DVDs of the P90X fitness routine (billed under “healthcare,” by the way).

Other purchases included:

- \$5,522 on what the campaign called “office equipment” from Euro Trash, an Illinois-based antique-import and design business whose must-see Web site (dig the massive chandeliers and to-die-for European antiques) declares that “everyone can and should live well.” Shearer, though, said the campaign purchased used office furniture, not antiques.
- \$1,565 in “travel expenses” from “J Bondi Inc.” in Beverly Hills. Shearer says this was for concert tickets (that company, CREW says, appears to be a holding company owned by **Elton John**).
- \$859 on “gifts” from Storks Snapshots (\$407) and the Bare Belly Boutique (\$452), upscale maternity boutiques in Illinois. We're still awaiting an explanation from Shearer



on that one.

Campaign finance lawyer **Brett Kappel** says Schock's spending is a bit, well, shocking, particularly for such a junior legislator. "It seems he has expensive tastes — or excessive ambition," Kappel says.

### **Newt's flagging effort**

Former House speaker and almost-former GOP presidential candidate **Newt Gingrich** put out a warm video thank-you to supporters Tuesday, a day before his official departure from the race.

In the short (105-second) video, Gingrich explains that he wanted his supporters "to know first because your help was vital" in the campaign. He thanked the "nearly 180,000 people who donated to the campaign and thousands more who worked as volunteers." He gave no special shout-out to casino mogul **Sheldon Adelson**, who with his family gave more than \$20 million to a pro-Gingrich super PAC.

As a result of all the support, Gingrich said, "we were able to put up a terrific campaign," and he and wife **Callista** were "very grateful."

But our colleague **Karen Tumulty** noticed that something ... something ... didn't seem right about the video.

Of course! The U.S. flag is on Gingrich's left — a major breach of protocol, not to mention Title 36 of the U.S. Code, which dictates that the flag be on the "speaker's right as he faces the audience."

So maybe it's just as well that he's getting out. The wheels have clearly come off the bus. In the old days, Gingrich surely would have bashed anyone for a similar faux pas.

Oh, well — it was fun there for a while.