

Crist tried to 'whitewash' probe Of Pearlman And Talent Rock

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By JOE FOLLICK

Sun Tallahassee Bureau
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TALLAHASSEE - Republican gubernatorial candidate Charlie Crist is the subject of a new book that claims the attorney general tried to "whitewash" an investigation into now-bankrupt talent and modeling agencies.

The book, "Under Investigation," was written by Les Henderson, an Ontario man who has previously written about how scams are operated. He is publishing the 511-page book himself. Crist's campaign manager George LeMieux was deputy attorney general under Crist and is at the center of Henderson's claim that the investigation was dismissed for political reasons.

LeMieux said Monday the claim was "without merit" and that neither he nor Crist had any role in deciding how investigations were pursued, leaving those decisions to staff attorneys around the state.

Beginning under Crist's predecessor, Bob Butterworth, the attorney general's office investigated a number of complaints against various modeling agencies that were later purchased by Lou Pearlman. Pearlman is a well-known entertainment entrepreneur and managed famous "boy bands" the Backstreet Boys and N'Sync. Pearlman and his affiliated companies gave \$5,000 to Crist's gubernatorial campaign in June 2005, more than a year after the attorney general's investigation was dropped.

The Attorney General's Office began investigating the companies in 2002 after receiving more than 2,000 complaints and continued when Crist took office in January 2003. Many of the complaints were based on actions of scouts from the businesses who would approach individuals in public with assertions that they could become models. Those interested were then asked to pay about \$1,000 to be listed on Internet sites with assurances of finding work.

The head of the attorney general's local economic crimes unit in Orlando that led the investigation, Jackie Dowd, said Monday she had prepared a lawsuit based on deceptive business practices against the companies. But she said she was dismissed after 11 years with the unit with no reason in early 2004 before the suit could be filed.

"There were no job issues, there were no performance issues," Dowd said of her dismissal. Asked if her involvement in the investigation of Pearlman's companies was a reason for the dismissal, Dowd said, "I certainly did wonder about that. That was one of the possibilities. I just don't know."

LeMieux said that Dowd resigned from her job after differences of opinion related in part to Dowd's speaking to the press about ongoing investigations. He said the parting was "amicable."

A few months later, Dowd's replacement - John MacGregor - eviscerated Dowd's work in a memo that largely praised Pearlman's businesses and led to the end of the investigation.....

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