

WisGOP: BREAKING: Democratic recruit for governor relying on group run by defense lawyer who faced RICO investigation, aired fake ads

Posted on Monday, Jun 5, 2017

>> **WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

Contact: Alec Zimmerman
[\(608\) 257-4765](tel:(608)257-4765)

[Madison, WI]—As Wisconsin Democrats gather for the state convention this evening, one of their recruits for governor is facing revelations that he hired a defense attorney to run his political group, Stage W, who has been under Racketeering Influenced and Corrupt Organization (RICO) investigation for hiding evidence and criticized for running a phony political operation. In response to the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* report, Republican Party of Wisconsin spokesman Alec Zimmerman put out the following statement:

“It’s not surprising Andy Gronik is becoming unhinged given the shady political activity he’s trying to cover up. While Governor Walker’s record of reform has helped Wisconsin become a Top 10 state for business and education, out-of-touch con artist Andy Gronik is already showing Wisconsinites undeniable proof that they can’t trust him to do the right thing.”

You can read the full story by watchdog columnist Dan Bice [here](#), or find excerpts below:

Milwaukee businessman Andy Gronik, who is weighing a Democratic bid for governor, doesn’t like being asked questions about the chief operating officer at his nonprofit agency.

Really, really doesn’t like it. ...

But let’s get to the issue at hand, Mark Iola, the chief operating officer for Gronik’s StageW.

Iola is a Dallas-based trial lawyer who has focused his practice on asbestos

litigation.

In 2014, Garlock Sealing Technologies, a North Carolina gasket maker, filed a counter suit in its bankruptcy case against Lola and other trial attorneys under federal racketeering laws. The suit accused the attorneys of “hiding evidence that their clients were exposed to asbestos products made by other companies,” according to Reuters.

The attorneys rejected the notion that they had done anything unethical to drive up the cost of a settlement and, of course, their fees. But a federal judge said he found a “startling pattern” of abuse by the plaintiffs’ lawyers, refusing to dismiss the complaints. ...

lola had also come under criticism in the 2005 election cycle for setting up a political advocacy group that took aim at federal GOP lawmakers who supported a bill to set up a trust fund to pay victims of asbestos-related illnesses. Such a measure would mean less money for attorneys filing asbestos cases in the courts. What was interesting about lola’s group, Senate Accountability Project, was that the liberal front group attacked the Republican senators from the right. The TV ads accused the senators of violating their pledges to states’ rights and limited government.

“The man behind the curtain at the Senate Accountability Project is named Mark lola,” said the head of a conservative group that filed a complaint in 2005 over the TV spots. “He is a Dallas trial lawyer who has made a lot of money from asbestos litigation.” ...

But couldn’t people say that Gronik was playing politics by avoiding any questions about lola to serve as a high-ranking official at StageW?

This time, Gronik declined to respond.

But the Republicans were glad to offer their input.

Alec Zimmerman, spokesman for the state GOP, accused Gronik of “sleight of hand instead of real answers” in “frantic” rant. Zimmerman added, “Was it ‘people before politics’ when he hired a guy like Mark lola to run his political group?”

Gronik has a hospitality room at Friday’s state Democratic convention. He has not said when he will make an announcement on whether he will challenge Walker.

###