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TPMmuckraker

# Top Stanford Aide Schmoozed Lawmakers, Sweet-Talked Journos

Zachary Roth | January 4, 2010, 8:33AM

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Yolanda Suarez and Allen Stanford

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described Suarez as "well-spoken, smart, and articulate." And he said she seemed to play a key role in Stanford's operation. "I had the impression she was running the business," he said. "She was in charge of the day-to-day stuff."

Indeed, running interference with reporters was only one of the ways in which Suarez was valuable to Stanford -- who today sits in a Houston prison, awaiting trial on charges of orchestrating a multi-billion Ponzi scheme. Since those charges were filed, Suarez's name has been almost entirely absent from news reports. That's surprising, because, as Stanford sought to maintain his financial empire and stay one step ahead of the federal government, she appears to have been a key player in his operation. Suarez left SFG last year, months before the SEC filed charges against Stanford. She hasn't been charged with a crime, or named publicly as a target of the federal investigation.

From 1999 until her departure from the company, Suarez, now 50, served as Stanford's "chief-of-staff." That title seems to have been a catch-all for a range of responsibilities. For instance, the Miami-based Suarez -- who came to SFG in 1992 as its general counsel -- served as president and CEO of Caribbean Sun and Caribbean Star, the airlines Stanford launched earlier this decade to service the region. But she also appears to have played a major role in helping Stanford to forge relationships with lawmakers and build influence in Washington. That was a top priority for Stanford over the last decade, as he sought to fight government efforts to crack down on offshore tax loopholes and root out financial fraud.

According to a resume [posted online](#) (pdf) that Suarez submitted in 2001 as part of Stanford's application to the Department of Transportation to operate the airline, Suarez handled the company's "governmental relations program." In other words, forging ties to members of Congress. She [stood by her boss's side](#) at a 2005 Capitol Hill event Stanford laid on, where lawmakers like Bob Ney, John Sweeney, and Tom Feeney schmoozed with Caribbean dignitaries. And she [served](#) -- alongside Henry Kissinger\* -- on the host committee for a 2008 awards ceremony organized by the Inter-American Economic Council, the Stanford-funded "non-profit" that [paid for many of those Caribbean trips](#) that Stanford laid on for lawmakers.

In May 2008, she and Stanford co-hosted what the *Miami Herald* described (via Nexis) as "a lavish gathering of powerful Washington insiders," featuring speeches from Madeleine Albright and Paul Wolfowitz, on the global financial crisis and the need for the private sector to work with government. The event, which was held just a month before the FBI launched the probe into SFG that would end with Stanford's indictment, seems designed to assure Washington that the company was a good corporate citizen.

In the late nineties, Douglas Farah, at the time a reporter for the *Washington Post*, was looking into a then-obscure Antigua-based businessman who had played a key role in helping the island nation rewrite its banking laws, frustrating U.S. efforts to crack down on money laundering.

Farah's reporting suggested that Allen Stanford wielded surprising influence in the Antiguan government. And Farah was hearing that the Texas-born billionaire and his company, the Stanford Financial Group (SFG), had ties to Latin American drug money.

That was when Farah received a dinner invitation from Bobby Nieves, a recently retired DEA agent he knew as a source. Joining them at Washington's swank Four Seasons would be a top Stanford aide: Yolanda Suarez.

At dinner, Suarez appeared to have one goal: "to dissuade me from the story," Farah told TPMmuckraker. "The whole purpose was that there was nothing wrong with Allen Stanford."

Farah said Suarez's PR effort had little effect on him -- and he ended up writing a [piece](#) that raised questions about Stanford's role in Antigua. But he

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Suarez's political contributions mirror those of her boss, and act as a good guide to the network of relationships Stanford forged with lawmakers. Since 2000, according to online records, she has given to Caribbean Caucus members Pete Sessions, Gregory Meeks, Donald Payne, Bob Ney, and Tom Feeney, among others, as well as senators John Cornyn, Chris Dodd, Bill Nelson, and Chuck Schumer, and the National Republican Senatorial Committee.

Suarez also represented SFG on a 2001 panel on corruption and money laundering, during an Americas conference held in Coral Gables, Florida. She argued that a proposed Senate bill that would crack down on money-laundering would have the undesirable effect of pushing U.S. businesses overseas.

During the 1980s, according to her resume, Suarez worked for Greenberg Traurig, the Miami-based law and lobbying firm that later **played a key role** in helping SFG negotiate some of the complex Latin American deals for which it came under scrutiny in the late 90s. Greenberg Traurig was also Jack Abramoff's employer for most of the period during which he bribed lawmakers earlier this decade.

Attempts to reach Suarez were not successful. According to a **profile on Linked In**, she set up a Miami-based management consulting firm last January, and is currently pursuing an MBA from the London School of Economics, focusing on emerging markets.

\* This sentence has been corrected from an earlier version.



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CityGuy JANUARY 4, 2010 9:38 AM

Where do you find people like her? I could use one of them myself! lol

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DickTater JANUARY 4, 2010 9:40 AM

emerging markets! Sounds like she should be working hand-in-glove with Kinda-Sleazy and Feith-less

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DickTater JANUARY 4, 2010 9:42 AM

Ooops...I think instead of Feith I meant one of the other myopic neo-con joy wizards from buusch's foreign affairs team...Stephen something or other

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mepmep0 JANUARY 4, 2010 10:17 AM in reply to DickTater

That would be Stephen Hadley who has **set up a consulting biz** with Condoleezza Rice.

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DickTater JANUARY 4, 2010 11:07 AM in reply to mepmep09

Yeah, what a world. Not only is there a whole industry of full-time, 3 shifts of legal beagles lobbying our congresscritters and gerrymandering the financial and judicial systems...but high ranking government officials rotate in and out of office and into these lobbying firms. You know it is fishy if we live in a society where some of this happens. You know you are doomed if it is a complete 365/year industry, being cozened and protected by our elected officials because they want to land there too, after being voted out.

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Cycler JANUARY 4, 2010 12:11 PM

Charlie Rangel's wife Alma has no relationship to Stanford or the IAEC. The invitation Zach references features Beatrice Rangel, a Miami businesswoman, who, as was pointed out by



another reader in response to the article linked above is not married to the the Congressman from Harlem.

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**Zachary Roth**

JANUARY 4, 2010 1:34 PM in reply to Cyclor



Thanks for catching that Cyclor. I've fixed the mistake.

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