

Par for the Course

By Dana Milbank
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Two years after his conviction in the Jack Abramoff affair, former Bush administration official David Safavian got a retrial yesterday -- or, as his golfing buddies might call it, a mulligan.

Safavian was assigned a 9 a.m. tee time by the starter, U.S. District Judge Paul Friedman. A jury of 16 spectators filled the gallery at the E. Barrett Prettyman Courthouse and Country Club. Prosecutors and defense lawyers lined up their shots, and teed off on one another.

"On the evening of August 3, 2002, nine people boarded a plane for Scotland," prosecutor Nathaniel Edmonds began, to enjoy the "world-famous golf courses, Scotch and cigars." The defendant, the government charged, "got on that luxury plane to go tee off at St. Andrews" with Abramoff at just the time Safavian was helping the superlobbyist win favorable government treatment.

But Dick Sauber, Safavian's attorney, said the government's drive "has fallen short." Abramoff and Safavian "were golfing buddies," Sauber admitted, and Safavian perhaps didn't pay all he should have for the "fancy trip to Scotland." But it didn't matter, the lawyer argued. "Because they were friends for years, David could have gone on the trip for free."

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