

Hard to lobby for 'Jack' - Boston Herald

Written by Administrator
Thursday, 06 January 2011 23:36 -

In "Casino Jack," Kevin Spacey plays real-life convicted felon Jack Abramoff, former legendary Washington lobbyist and a man no politician claimed to know after he was sent to jail.

Spacey, a two-time Academy Award winner for "The Usual Suspects" (1995) and "American Beauty" (1999), plays Abramoff, a college Republican,

conservative Jew and weight lifter hoisted on the petard of his own incriminating e-mails (beware, my friends), in an effusive larger-than-life style.

Abramoff infamously charged Indian casinos, whose interests he supposedly represented, exorbitant amounts of money that he then used to gain influence and power among mostly Republican politicians. He is depicted in the film as a delusional egomaniac unaware of the wrongness of his behavior. Great.

Kelly Preston makes Abramoff's wife clueless and in denial, accurate perhaps, but not very interesting.

Spacey uses his great gift for mimicry in his portrayal of Abramoff, a full-time film buff and sometime writer-producer ("Red Scorpion," anyone?). But the character as written by Norman Snider ("Call Me: The Rise and Fall of Heidi Fleiss") lacks charm or charisma. He's a self-absorbed blowhard.

"Casino Jack" will be remembered as the last film made by director George Hickenlooper ("Hearts of Darkness: A Filmmaker's Apocalypse"), who died recently at 47.

The film is merely irreverent when it should be scathing. The best thing about it is Jon Lovitz's turn as a corrupt businessman who runs afoul of the mob. Plus, in a country exhausted by around-the-clock coverage of malfeasance in Washington, I wonder how much interest is out there for films such as this or that other current entry "Fair Game."

For a more fact-based version of the Abramoff story, you may choose to see the 2010 release "Casino Jack and the United States of Money," a terrific, nonfiction film from Alex Gibney ("Taxi

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to the Dark Side,” “Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room”). If Spacey’s Abramoff had been more compelling, “Casino Jack” might have had more heft.

As it is, it’s a TV movie.

Rated R. At Kendall Square and West Newton cinemas.

(“Casino Jack” contains profanity, brief nudity and violence.)

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