

Feds Indict Ray Nagin on 21 Count

Written by George E. Curry
Wednesday, 30 January 2013 00:00

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C. Ray Nagin, the businessman and former New Orleans mayor who famously jumped out of a horse-drawn carriage to second line with residents while en route to his first inauguration and promised to end corruption in city government, was indicted Friday on 21 counts by a federal grand jury. His arraignment is set for January 31.

The 21 corruption charges filed against 56-year-old Nagin Friday include wire fraud, bribery and money laundering. The charges are the latest development in a federal probe of City Hall that has already resulted in guilty pleas by two city officials and two businessmen.

Greg Meffert, a former technology official and deputy mayor under Nagin, pleaded guilty in 2010 to charges he took bribes and kickbacks in exchange for steering city contracts to businessman Mark St. Pierre. Anthony Jones, who served as the city's chief technology officer in Nagin's administration, also pleaded guilty to taking payoffs.

Meffert cooperated with the government in its case against St. Pierre, who was convicted in May 2011 of charges that include conspiracy, bribery and money laundering.

The federal probe gained a key witness in November 2012 when Destrehan businessman Rodney Williams admitted that he gave payments totaling \$60,000 in 2008 to an unnamed public official in return for city contracts steered to Williams' engineering firm, according to court documents.

Williams also said he paid id="mce_marker"0,000 to close family members of the public official,

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who were not identified by name.

In June of 2012, businessman Frank Fradella pleaded guilty in federal court to bribing an unnamed public official with \$50,000 in cash and “truckloads” of free granite delivered to a granite countertop installation company owned by the official.

One of the first memorable days in Nagin’s first term included an early-morning police raid that rounded up residents with outstanding warrants. One of those placed in handcuffs and paraded on the local evening news was a young cousin of Mayor Nagin, a fact which led many to believe that the city had finally elected a mayor that would not tolerate corruption or illegal activity of any kind.

Eleven years later, it is the former mayor who finds himself being indicted on nearly two dozen corruption charges by a federal grand jury.

It is not clear what will happen next with regard to Nagin’s two sons, Jeremy and Jarin Nagin, who were also investigated by the federal probe because they owned stakes in Stone Age LLC, a Nagin family-owned countertop company that held a lucrative contract to install tile with The Home Depot. Some legal experts surmised that the case against the former mayor might have been wrapped up sooner but the Feds might have tried to work out a deal to keep the former mayor’s two sons from going to prison.

Jeremy and Jarin Nagin appeared before a grand jury last fall and provided documents in response to a subpoena, their attorney Clarence Roby confirmed in October, noting that the two were not considered targets of an investigation.

Still, a number of legal experts have said that it is not uncommon for the Feds to use family members as leverage in public corruption cases.

Nagin, a former television cable executive and part-owner of a hockey team, was tapped by the white business community to run for mayor. Despite bringing up the rear in the 2001 mayoral race, Nagin rose quickly up the ranks thanks to the financial support of the white business

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community and a nod of approval from white New Orleans.

Hurricane Katrina brought Nagin national acclaim, earning him appearances in the national media on evening news segments and on shows like "60 Minutes."

Riding a wave of Black support after declaring that New Orleans would forever remain a "Chocolate City," Nagin defeated challenger Mitch Landrieu in 2006 to win a second term as mayor. After an unsuccessful attempt to get a third term as mayor, Nagin was succeeded by current New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu.

Since leaving office, Nagin has self-published a memoir titled *Katrina's Secrets* and has offered his services as a public speaker and disaster-recovery consultant to other cities.

Ramessu Merriamen Aha, a New Orleans-born businessman and former congressional candidate, said Friday that his most vivid memory of the former mayor involves watching the mayor travel to Dallas immediately after Hurricane Katrina to meet with a group of wealthy white New Orleanians to begin working on a blueprint for re-inventing and repopulating New Orleans.

"When he was asked why he agreed to meet with a group that did not include Black residents, Nagin simply said that Blacks don't contribute to the New Orleans economy in a meaningful way, as if that justifies depriving Blacks of their constitutional rights," he told *The Louisiana Weekly*. "Since that meeting, the public school system has been ripped apart, thousands of New Orleans teachers have been illegally terminated, public school funds have been misappropriated and used by the state's voucher program, the city's housing projects have been torn down, tens of thousands of displaced Blacks have been unable to return home to New Orleans, Black homeowners have been systematically shortchanged by the Road Home program and eight years after Hurricane Katrina the Ninth Ward and New Orleans East have still not been rebuilt. It looks like wealthy and powerful whites in New Orleans got everything they wanted, thanks to 'Ray-Ray' and his refusal to stand up for Black residents."

"When you consider how little Ray Nagin did for Black people in New Orleans, the whole 'Choco-late City' remark and its aftermath is laughable," Ramessu Merriamen Aha added.

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The Rev. Raymond Brown, president of National Action Now, said Nagin's indictment will not change the way the Black community feels about the former mayor and his failure to meet its needs. "He was a good mayor for the middle class and the white establishment but in all honesty did very little for Black people, working-class families and the city's poorest residents," Brown told *The Louisiana Weekly*. "He was not for all the people.

"He did not really represent the interests of the Black masses and the poor and working class families in the city," Brown said. "Blacks in particular did not benefit under his administration.

While Brown conceded that Nagin is "innocent until proven guilty," he doesn't see how the former mayor can dispute the charges filed Friday against him. "It seems like they have connected the dots in this case. It's just another bad chapter in New Orleans history."

Brown says he is still bitterly disappointed by former Mayor Ray Nagin's refusal to speak out after members of the NOPD murdered Henry Glover, Ronald Madison and James Brissette and shot other Black residents in the wake of 2005's Hurricane Katrina.

"I asked him specifically to comment on the Danziger Bridge and Henry Glover incidents when he was mayor and he looked me in the eye and said, 'No comment,'" Brown told *The Louisiana Weekly*. "That's something I will never forget and something that really affected me — to see a Black mayor refuse to stand up for Black people. He never attended any rallies, he never met with the families and he refused to comment on these high-profile NOPD cases. He will have to live with that."

WBOK radio general manager and talk-show host Paul Beaulieu said Friday that Nagin's biggest mistake may have been turning into Django, a move underscored by the former mayor's "Chocolate City" comments and his criticism of efforts by those in the business community to shrink the city's footprint. "He could never recover from that."

"I want to say to white folks, 'You gave us Ray Nagin,'" Beau-lieu said on his radio show Friday. "You can't put that on us. That was your white Negro."

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Loyola University law professor Dane Ciolino told Reuters News Service Friday that the charges do not necessarily mean Nagin will go to trial.

“The vast majority of these cases end in a negotiated plea,” Ciolino said.

“This is a sad day for the city of New Orleans,” New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu said Friday. “Today’s indictment of former Mayor Ray Nagin alleges serious violations of the public’s trust. Public corruption cannot and will not be tolerated.”

Additional reporting by Louisiana Weekly editor Edmund W. Lewis.[{jcomments on}](#)