

# Rep. Jefferson linked to corruption

By Lorinda M. Bullock  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - Since Hurricane Katrina ripped through his congressional district last August, Rep. William J. Jefferson (D-La.) has been fighting on Capitol Hill for much needed funds to help rebuild his hurricane-ravaged 2nd District, one of the hardest hit in New Orleans.

But now, Jefferson is in the center of a new storm that could be just as devastating to his political career.

Jefferson's Capitol Hill office was raided over the weekend, the first for a sitting member of Congress. A redacted copy of the warrant was released Sunday by the FBI.

The indictment accuses the eight-term congressman of accepting bribes and using his office and influence to illegally participate in high-tech business ventures in Nigeria, Cameroon and Ghana.

According to the 83-page affidavit, the FBI had been tracking Jefferson since last March. The FBI was tipped off by a woman the *Washington Post* named as Lori Mody, a wealthy northern Virginia businesswoman who, persuaded by Jefferson, invested millions of dollars into iGate Inc., a Louisville-based telecommunications company.

The document describes iGate as a company that produces high-speed Internet and cable television services that is transmitted through copper wires.



Rep. William Jefferson, D-La., takes part in a Capitol Hill news conference on Monday.

At a Capitol Hill news conference Monday, Jefferson said, "There are two sides to every story; there are certainly two sides to this story. There will be an appropriate time and forum when that can be explained."

Mody, worried about being swindled out of nearly \$4 million she had invested in iGate, approached the FBI about investigating Jefferson, the document said.

Jefferson, a Harvard-trained lawyer, is considered an expert on information technology issues. While he has not been charged, the affidavit said Vernon Jackson, president and CEO of iGate, and Brett Pfeffer, a former member of Jefferson's congressional staff, were included as targets of the investigation and both pleaded guilty earlier this year for

bribing the congressman to promote iGate's technology to African nations.

The *Washington Post* reported that about 15 FBI agents entered Jefferson's congressional office on Saturday evening and completed the search Sunday afternoon.

Key evidence included in the affidavit came from recorded discussions that were also videotaped from July 30, 2005, when Jefferson allegedly accepted \$100,000 in a reddish brown leather briefcase from a witness the *Washington Post* named as Lori Mody in a Ritz Carlton parking lot in northern Virginia.

Mody cooperated with the FBI by secretly wearing an electronic wire, the document said. She was not identified in the affidavit as a target of the 14-month sting

operation.

Mody allegedly gave the money to Jefferson to pay off African officials in Nigeria and Ghana to persuade them to use iGate Inc., a Kentucky-based telecommunications company that offers broadband technology, including the Internet and cable television, the affidavit stated.

Surprisingly, Republicans, who had hoped to exploit the Jefferson case in the upcoming congressional elections, rushed to his defense after the FBI raided his office.

House Speaker J. Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.) issued a statement Monday night saying, "The actions of the Justice Department in seeking and executing this warrant raise

important Constitutional issues that go well beyond the specifics of this case."

He explained, "Insofar as I am aware, since the founding of our republic 219 years ago, the Justice Department has never found it necessary to do what it did Saturday night, crossing this separation of powers line, in order to successfully prosecute corruption by members of Congress. Nothing I have learned in the last 48 hours leads me to believe that there was any necessity to change the precedent established over those 219 years."

Former House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) sent an e-mail to his former colleagues calling the raid "the most blatant violation of the Constitutional separation of powers in my lifetime."

The Jefferson case also complicates the Democrats' plan to exploit the corruption admissions of Republican lobbyist Jack Abramoff.

Carl Forti, a spokesman for the National Republican Congressional Committee, told the *Washington Post*: "As bad as people want to say the Abramoff situation was, it didn't lead to any House offices getting raided."

Typically, the FBI seeks subpoenas for items they need rather than raid a federal lawmaker's office.

Jefferson, 59, carries con-

siderable clout because he co-chairs the Africa Trade and Investment Caucus as well as the Congressional Caucuses on Brazil and Nigeria and is a member of the Congressional Black Caucus.

The first African-American to be elected to Congress from Louisiana since Reconstruction, Jefferson is a senior member of the powerful Ways and Means Committee and its subcommittee on trade. He is a former chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus.

In one taped conversation with Mody that mentions his Nigerian connections, the affidavit said Jefferson discussed the importance of someone in Nigeria the document refers to as "John Doe #1... We need him. We got to motivate him really good," Jefferson allegedly told Mody. "He's got a lot of folks to pay off."

On August 3, 2005, a few days after the parking lot transaction, Jefferson's Washington, D.C., home was raided. Investigators found \$90,000 in Jefferson's freezer stuffed in frozen food containers and wrapped in aluminum foil, the document said.

Jefferson addressed the investigation May 15 while in New Orleans.

"I would take full responsibility for any crime that I (See Jefferson, Page 5)

## S.C. girl protests ban on Confederate flag apparel

LATTA, S.C. (AP) - A 15-year-old girl led a small protest march Monday over her high school's ban on Confederate flag clothing, which she is also challenging in court.

Candice Hardwick walked with about a dozen people, about half of them family members and some wearing Confederate T-shirts, a few blocks to Latta High School. Hardwick wore a Confederate belt buckle and button and had the Confederate flag on her cell phone cover. She removed those items before entering the school, where she is a sophomore.

Hardwick says she wants to wear the emblem to pay tribute to ancestors who fought on the Confederate side of the Civil War. She said she has been forced to change clothes or turn her shirt inside out, and has been suspended twice and threatened with being kicked off the track team.

John Kirby, school superintendent, said Monday that officials "have clothing issues every year... and we've handled it consis-

tently every time."

Among those marching with Candice was a Black man, H.K. Edgerton, past chairman of the Southern Legal Resource Center's advisory board. The group filed a federal lawsuit in March on her behalf.

"She's made a stand for her Southland," said Edgerton. A former local NAACP leader in North Carolina, he is known for dressing up in Confederate gear to emphasize what he describes as the role Blacks played in voluntarily supporting the South in the Civil War.

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 1969 that the First Amendment protects students' political expressions during school hours so long as they don't substantially disrupt the education process.

The high court has not ruled specifically on whether a student may wear Confederate symbols. Three years ago, the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Atlanta upheld a lower court ruling allowing a school to ban the Confederate flag.

## Reporter regrets White separatists' interview

TAMPA, Fla. (AP) - A veteran TV reporter said he regrets consenting to an interview by a member of a White separatist group during which he spoke bluntly about illegal immigrants.

Don Germaise, a reporter with WFTS-TV known for his hurricane coverage, did the interview with David Daugherty, webmaster for the Tampa unit of the National Vanguard.

The group, which believes the media are controlled by Jews and that ethnic diversity harms America, posted the video on its website.

Germaise, who said he agreed to the interview after taping his own talk with Daugherty, gave his personal views on free speech, illegal immigration and the control his bosses at Tampa's ABC affiliate exert over his stories.

Bill Carey, WFTS vice

president and general manager, told the *St. Petersburg Times* for a story published Saturday that he was reserving judgment until he had more time to review Germaise's actions.

"All these illegal immigrants are causing a huge strain on government services because they want free medical care, they want to be able to drive, they want all of these resources that are available in this great country of ours," Germaise says on the video.

"Yet they're not paying taxes because they're illegal immigrants. If you're in the country illegally, you shouldn't be here."

When asked by Daugherty whether media owners influence the news process, Germaise said, "When the boss speaks, the workers listen. I have definitely had my manager say

we need to do this kind of a story," he said.

"Did it come from ABC, did it come from Walt Disney? Did it come from someone else? I don't know. I do know there have been times when I've been told to do a story."

Daugherty, 28, posted Germaise's interview May 9. It has been downloaded thousands of times, Daugherty said.

"This is a guy who told me in an interview he wanted every Black person in America moved to another state," Germaise said of Daugherty. "I can state unequivocally that there is nothing about this group that I like. I was naive... to let them use my words to make it appear the way they did. I was wrong."

Germaise developed a story on the National Vanguard for WFTS this month.