

# Is Rep. Jefferson victim of double standard?

By Hazel Trice Edney  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - Former U.S. Rep. Dan Rostenkowski (D-Ill.) served in Congress 36 years until 1995 when he lost re-election. Charged with keeping ghost employees on his payroll, using congressional money to buy gifts and trading in officially purchased stamps for cash, he pled guilty to the lesser charge of mail fraud, served 15 of a 17-month sentence in prison and was later pardoned by President Bill Clinton.

Similarly, former U.S. Rep. Joe McDade (R-Pa.) was indicted on bribery and racketeering charges in 1992 after the Federal Bureau of Investigation spent eight years probing his political activities. Ultimately, a jury acquitted him in 1996.

Despite the severity of the charges and lengths of the investigations in the cases of Rostenkowski, McDade and many other congressional lawmakers since the founding of the United States, the FBI had never raided a congressional office. Not until May 20 when 15 agents searched and seized documents from the Capitol Hill office of U.S. Rep. William Jefferson (D-La.), who has been accused of accepting bribes in exchange for using his influence in private dealings with high-tech businesses in Nigeria, Cameroon and Ghana.

While Jefferson, a Harvard-trained lawyer and constitutional scholars around the nation debate whether the federal agency violated the separation of powers provision of the U.S. Constitution, there are enough troubling questions for everyone. Of course, Jefferson needs to explain the \$90,000 found in his home freezer — and he pledges to do that at the appropriate time. Nevertheless, the FBI

also needs to explain what was so unique in the Jefferson case that caused it to raid his office — other than the fact that he is Black.

Jefferson has been advised by attorneys to remain silent on the facts of the case, including the cash found in his home freezer in Washington during an FBI raid recently. FBI documents allege the money came from a briefcase with \$100,000 in marked \$100 bills that he had received as a bribe from a cooperating witness. The FBI said it videotaped the transaction.

The clash between executive and legislative powers has prompted Republicans to speak out against the FBI Capitol Hill raid, not because of any affinity for Jefferson, but on constitutional principles. The acrimony is so deep that President Bush has ordered the seized documents to be held by an independent party until tempers can cool on both sides.

In addition, given a history of racism and unequal treatment in the criminal justice system towards Blacks, some experts are not ruling out racism as a motive. It is an issue they discuss gingerly.

"No one is above the law, including a congressman; especially a congressman. I believe that the allegations against Congressman Jefferson would have been investigated whether he was White or Black or whether this was a Democrat or Republican administration," said Charles Tieffer, a constitutional scholar and law professor at the University of Baltimore School of Law. "But it is hard to understand why he was not investigated in the same way that all other congressmen before him have been investigated. But instead, his office was raided."

Tieffer knows how other

congressional representatives have been treated. He has worked as deputy general counsel of the House, a trial attorney with the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice, and as an assistant legal counsel for the Senate.

Tieffer was one of the legal experts called to testify before the House Judiciary Community during last week's hearings about the controversial Jefferson raids and how investigations should be conducted in the future. In an interview, he said he is still perplexed by several aspects of the raid.

"A number of observers agree with me that if you study carefully what the FBI and Justice Department have put forth, they not only make no showing of an emergency situation requiring something special like a raid. But, more than that, they do not even claim that there was an emergency situation requiring something extraordinary," Tieffer explains. "So, while I would be extremely reluctant to make the assertion for which there is no direct evidence whatsoever — that it was because of his race that the raid occurred — something seemed to have misled the Justice Department and FBI officials into failing to understand or anticipate that the House of Representatives' bipartisan leadership, that is both [Republican] Speaker [Dennis] Hastert and Democratic Leader [Nancy] Pelosi would come together and denounce the raid as wrong."

Tieffer speculates, "One possibility is that the Justice Department officials simply did not imagine that a Black Democratic congressman would get bipartisan support from both the Republican Party leadership and the Democratic Party leadership. They may have looked at him as an isolated figure that you

could use tactics on that you might not be able to use on a senior White Republican congressman."

Jefferson said he has received comforting support from his constituents in New Orleans, where he has been addressing Hurricane Katrina-related issues and last week spoke at Mayor Ray Nagin's inauguration.

"I don't have a lot of pressure back home from regular people to explain this [to them] and explain that. Ba-

sically, they are very supportive, and I thank God for that," he said. "And I know that though in the larger community people are looking at things and they see them happen for the first time with me after 219 years, and they wonder, 'Well, there have been other cases and apparently there was a way for them to get information from other offices and all the rest and why in this case?'"

Still, public sentiment and those from among his col-

leagues in the Congressional Black Caucus say that he has a lot of explaining to do. Especially given that FBI documents claim that Vernon Jackson, president and CEO of iGate, a Louisville-based tech firm, and former Jefferson staffer Brett Pfeffer, were suspects in the investigation and have already confessed that they bribed Jefferson.

U.S. Rep. Bobby Scott, a member of the Congressional (See Jefferson, Page 11)

## Your Horoscope Says...

### June 8-June 14

#### ARIES

Begin working to improve the quality of life in your community. Don't hang back. Do it. Joy comes from what you give this week. This week your charm will open doors that were previously closed.

Soul Affirmation: I look for the good in all that comes to me this week.

Lucky Numbers: 41, 52, 55

#### TAURUS

Be open and honest in your dealings with a co-worker. Deception will double back on you, if you try it. This is a bad week for being sly. Your true intentions show on your face. Be thorough don't cut corners.

Soul Affirmation: I let my words reveal the not-so-hidden truth about my being.

Lucky Numbers: 18, 29, 30

#### GEMINI

The boss is depending on you at work this week. The reward is buried in the gifts you give to whoever crosses your path. Don't look for payment for the good you do. Time will send it surging out at you.

Soul Affirmation: I give thanks for the chance to give.

Lucky Numbers: 7, 26, 35

#### CANCER

You've always had the ability to take the slow and easy route to getting things done. This week is an excellent week for practicing that method to the maximum. Friends are not going to help you with the problem you face, but go slow and easy and you can handle it alone.

Soul Affirmation: Slow and easy is the best way for me to travel this week.

Lucky Numbers: 12, 24, 31

#### LEO

Use your tried and true formula for a successful week. Remember the things that worked for you in the past. Now is not the time to try anything new. Forget about a minor irritation that comes from someone you love.

Soul Affirmation: I find comfort in the familiar.

Lucky Numbers: 4, 26, 29

#### VIRGO

Give yourself a chance to grow, and not by eating more. Eating good is okay, but for true growth, expand your horizons. Look at life a little bit differently. Take a walk on the other side of the question.

Soul Affirmation: I look to distant horizons to find truth this week.

Lucky Numbers: 8, 23, 31

#### LIBRA

Just start talking. What you need to say next will come to you. You've got some explaining to do and silence will get you nowhere. Love can be yours at this time but you're going to have to use your gift for gab to get it.

Soul Affirmation: Charm is my middle name this week.

Lucky Numbers: 17, 26, 29

#### SCORPIO

This is just the kind of time you like, so enjoy it. Family members are not busy. You can get into their heads and see what's going on. Open up your own head and let someone in. You are at your best, socially, so have some fun. A romantic bond becomes stronger.

Soul Affirmation: I love charming, positive head games.

Lucky Numbers: 33, 43, 52

#### SAGITTARIUS

Spend some time thinking about mutual needs. Just because it's what you want, it may not be your lover's fond desire. Give a little to get something that you need right now — someone to be with. Save the self-importance for another week.

Soul Affirmation: I enlarge my happiness by forgetting about myself this week.

Lucky Numbers: 17, 29, 30

#### CAPRICORN

Take the lead, especially in romantic matters. Throw modesty out the window. Be in shameless pursuit. You know that your need is great this week. Seek to satisfy it. Your lover might be surprised, but you can make the surprise a pleasant one.

Soul Affirmation: I hunt for love in all the right places.

Lucky Numbers: 29, 34, 51

#### AQUARIUS

Heads or tails! Go or stay! What to do? This week you'll find yourself pulled in two exactly opposite directions. There is no way to satisfy both pulls. Let your friends decide. Take whatever suggestion comes first.

Soul Affirmation: I let my friendships guide my way.

Lucky Numbers: 41, 47, 50

#### PISCES

Don't waste time thinking about the past. Sure, they were wrong, but what does it matter now. Enjoy the present. Find something good to do for the rest of the week. Avoid conflict. Nothing is so important that it needs to be resolved this week.

Soul Affirmation: This week I forgive myself for everything that has happened.

Lucky Numbers: 23, 28, 49



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