

Former police officer indicted in Taser death

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — A former police officer accused of repeatedly jolting a handcuffed man with a Taser before he died was indicted on a manslaughter charge recently by a grand jury in central Louisiana.

The Winn Parish grand jury also indicted former Winnfield police officer Scott Nugent on a charge of malfeasance in office stemming from the Jan. 17 death of Baron Pikes, 21.

Pikes was shocked nine times with a 50,000-volt Taser as he was arrested on a drug possession warrant in January, authorities said. Winn Parish District Attorney Chris Nevils said Nugent broke the law when he “unnecessarily” used the Taser on Pikes multiple times and failed to get him medical attention “when it was apparent he needed it.”

“In a civilized society, abuse by those who are given great authority cannot be tolerated,” Nevils said in a statement.

Nugent, who is scheduled to be arraigned Aug. 21, faces up to 40 years in prison if convicted of the manslaughter charge. The malfeasance charge carries a maximum sentence of five years in prison.

Nugent was fired but is appealing his dismissal. Phillip Terrell, Nugent’s lawyer, has said his client followed department protocols and didn’t use excessive force.

After the panel’s decision, Terrell said the grand jury has only heard prosecutors’ side of the story. “It now comes time for us to be able to present our side of the story,” he said.

Since the grand jury’s decision, Terrell said Nugent had surrendered to sheriff’s deputies and was booked on the two charges. He was released from jail after posting \$45,000 bond, Terrell said.

The parish’s coroner, Dr. Randolph Williams, ruled in June that Pikes’ death was a homicide. Williams said he consulted with two other coroners, and both agreed that Pikes died of cardiac arrest caused by the Taser shocks.

Terrell disagreed with the coroner’s conclusion but said he hasn’t pinpointed the cause of death. “We haven’t been allowed to see the autopsies yet,” he said.

Carol Powell Lexing, a lawyer for Pikes’ family, called the indictments “just one step toward justice.”

Anger over Pikes’ death

has threatened to inflame racial tensions in Winnfield, where the population of roughly 5,800 is evenly divided between Black and White residents. Pikes was Black; Nugent is White.

The episode also has drawn comparisons to the so-called “Jena Six” case, which thrust a neighboring city in the national spotlight.

Winnfield is about 40 miles northwest of Jena, the site of a massive civil rights protest last year. Thousands of demonstrators gathered there to protest criminal cases against six Black teenagers charged with beating a White student at a high school.

State Sen. Gerald Long, a Winnfield native and third cousin of legendary former Gov. Huey Long, expressed confidence that community leaders won’t allow the fallout from Pikes’ death to divide the city along racial lines.

“We pray that it will not become a spectacle comparable to what took place in Jena,” Long said. “Is it an explosive situation that can create a backlash? Sure, but that’s not what I see.”

Lawrence Spikes, a minister who ran unsuccessful campaigns for mayor of

(See Taser, Page 10)

Kilpatrick not allowed at Democrats meeting

Special to Sentinel-Voice

(NNPA) - Barack Obama doesn’t want Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick and his legal troubles to be a distraction at the upcoming Democratic National Convention, and he got his wish last week when a judge ordered the city executive to stay home.

Michigan spokesman for Obama, Brent Colburn, said in an e-mail Aug. 14 that the focus of the convention in Denver next week should be on Obama and not on what Colburn called “the troubles of one individual,” a reference to Kilpatrick and the two criminal cases he’s facing.

Kilpatrick, who would have gone to the convention as a superdelegate, faces eight felony charges in a perjury case and two felony charges in an assault case.

The day began when a judge overseeing Kilpatrick’s arraignment on perjury and other charges said the mayor could get rid of the tether around his ankle and attend the convention.

By afternoon, however, another judge handling the assault charges signed an order emphasizing that the tether remains a condition of release in that case. It was back on the mayor’s ankle nearly four hours after it was removed.

“The lawyers for the mayor said they were willing to comply,” said Rusty Hills, spokesman for the Michigan attorney general’s office, which is prosecuting the assault case.

Kilpatrick and his former top aide, Christine Beatty, were charged in March with conspiracy, perjury, obstruction of justice and misconduct in office, mostly tied to their testimony in a civil trial. Sexually explicit text messages between the pair, published by the *Detroit Free Press* in January, contradict their sworn denials of an affair, a key point in the trial last year involving a former deputy police chief.

Separately, Kilpatrick is accused of assaulting two investigators who were at his sister’s house trying to serve a subpoena in the perjury case.

Wayne County Circuit Judge Leonard Townsend, who is overseeing the perjury case, turned a routine arraignment Aug. 14 into a dramatic scene when he suddenly declared that Kilpatrick could get rid of the device that tracks his moves and go to Denver. The mayor had been barred from traveling outside the Detroit metro area.

“I see absolutely no reason for that, and it’s silly,” said Townsend, drawing an immediate protest from the prosecutor, who promised an appeal.

Prosecutor Lisa Lindsey reminded the judge that Kilpatrick’s travel was restricted because he earlier had violated the conditions of his release.

“I think you’re losing your composure,” Townsend said.

The Wayne County prosecutor’s office (See Kwame, Page 4)

Rep. Tubbs Jones of Ohio dies of brain hemorrhage

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Democratic U.S. Rep. Stephanie Tubbs Jones, the first Black woman to represent Ohio in Congress and a strong critic of the Iraq war, died Wednesday after having a brain hemorrhage, a Cleveland Clinic official said.

Tubbs Jones, 58, died at 6:12 p.m. after



U.S. Rep. Stephanie Tubbs Jones

suffering a brain hemorrhage caused by an aneurysm that burst and left her with limited brain function, spokeswoman Eileen Sheil said.

“Throughout the course of the day and into this evening, Congresswoman Tubbs Jones’ medical condition declined,” Sheil said in a statement from the clinic and Tubbs Jones’ family.

The liberal Democrat, first elected in 1998, suffered the hemorrhage while driving her car in Cleveland Heights Tuesday night, said Dr. Gus Kious, president of Huron Hospital in East Cleveland.

She had suffered “a very serious brain hemorrhage” caused by an aneurysm that burst in an inaccessible part of her brain, he said.

A brain aneurysm is a bulge in an artery in the brain. It can leak or rupture, causing bleeding in the brain.

Tubbs Jones represented the heavily Democratic 11th District and chaired the ethics committee in the House.

She was the first Black woman to serve on the powerful Ways and Means Committee, where she opposed President Bush’s tax cuts and his efforts to create personal accounts within Social Security.

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