

KY TRIVIA

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Frankfort & Kentucky



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BID-RIGGING TRIAL

Prosecution wraps up case

Attorney tells jury government's informant lied on witness stand

BY JEFFREY MCMURRAY
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

LEXINGTON, Ky. (AP) — Former Kentucky Transportation Secretary Bill Nighbert's attorney told a jury Tuesday that the government's informant "lied from the witness stand" in the federal corruption trial of Nighbert and prominent road contractor Leonard Lawson.

In his opening statement after the prosecution rested Tuesday afternoon, defense attorney Kent Wicker took immediate aim at engineer Jim Rummage, the chief prosecution witness. Rummage had testified that Nighbert asked him to deliver confidential project estimates to Lawson, who then rewarded him with thousands of dollars in cash bribes.

That bribery charge still stands, as do allegations of theft, obstruction of justice and conspiracy. But U.S. District Judge Karl Forester dealt the prosecution a legal defeat Tuesday by dismissing other bribery counts against the two men.

Prosecutors had argued

Lawson helped Nighbert land what they called a "fake job" in one of his companies as a kickback for his efforts passing on the confidential estimates that allegedly helped Lawson's bidding. Forester, however, agreed with the defense that there wasn't enough proof. The judge also expressed concerns previously about Rummage's reliability.

Wicker launched one of the fiercest attacks yet on Rummage's credibility as a witness. Nearly all of Rummage's story was fabricated, he said, in an effort to shield himself from prosecution and possibly even line his pockets in a future whistleblower claim.

Wicker said the defense would call Lawson's wife, Bonnie, as one of its witnesses. Wicker said she would testify that Rummage lied when he said he met her during one visit to Lawson's home when Rummage claimed he dropped off bid estimates and was given \$5,000 as a reward.

The visit never happened, Wicker said, because Bonnie Lawson was ill in the hos-

pital, accompanied by her husband.

"He was not giving over money to Jim Rummage," Wicker said. "He was at the bedside of his wife."

Wicker said the defense also would prove that around the time Rummage was secretly recording phone conversations with Lawson and handing them over to the FBI, he was doing Internet research on how to delete any trace of recordings stored on his phone.

The defense contends he gave prosecutors the ones that were most damaging to Lawson and Nighbert but deleted the ones that hinted at their innocence.

Rummage also searched the Internet to read about possible compensation that can be paid out in whistleblower cases, Wicker said.

The first defense witness to take the stand Tuesday was Jon Woodall, an attorney with connections to Lawson. Prosecutors claim Lawson urged Rummage to hire Woodall to represent him in the investigation.

In one recorded conversation, Lawson tells Rum-

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mage: "And that ain't going to cost you nothing," a statement the prosecution has relied on to form part of its obstruction of justice claim.

Woodall testified he did talk with Rummage but told him he couldn't represent him due to a conflict of interest stemming from his association with Lawson. He said he found it "peculiar" that Rummage told him several times that he couldn't afford an attorney.

During cross-examination by prosecutor Ken Taylor, Woodall said the firm never charges for a first conversation but wasn't sure if Lawson knew that.

FRANKFORT INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

Crowe: District still moving toward top 10

Board asks for quarterly reports on progress made for goals

BY KATHERAN WASSON
STATE JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

Frankfort Independent Schools is progressing toward its goal of being a top 10 district by 2011, Superintendent Rich Crowe told school board members Tuesday during his mid-year review.

No action was taken regarding the evaluation, and there was little discussion about Crowe's performance. He will be up for an end-of-the-year evaluation in July.

Board members asked Crowe to provide a quarterly report about where the district stands on its goals of improving test scores, attendance and staving off dropouts.

Crowe says he's confident the district will meet all 23 of its targets in the federal No Child Left Behind program this year. Last year, FIS failed to make significant gains with students on free or reduced lunch in reading.

He's also considering strategies Beechwood Independent Schools used to improve scores on the ACT exam, which is now mandatory for all Kentucky public school juniors.

"We don't teach grammar," he said. "We don't teach grammar at all."

Beginning with this year's freshman class, Frankfort High has a goal of graduating every student. Administrators are alerting Crowe when a student

is considering dropping out, so he can meet with the teen and his or her parents.

"We've got to have things to make it worthwhile for them to stay until they're 18," he said.

Crowe said some elements of the district's top 10 goal haven't been implemented yet because of changes to public education at the state and federal level.

Kentucky legislators approved Senate Bill 1 last year, overhauling the state's testing system. The Kentucky Department of Education will release new teaching standards next month.

This is the first time board members have reviewed Crowe's performance publicly.

In the past, school boards have conducted superintendent evaluations in closed sessions, citing an exemption in the state's open meetings law that allows public agencies to meet in private to discuss personnel issues.

Attorney General Jack Conway has since ruled that Kentucky's open meetings law allows for closed-door personnel discussions only if it "might lead to the appointment, discipline or dismissal" of the individual.

General personnel discussions must be conducted in public, he said.

AROUND FRANKFORT

Help still needed for count

Blue Grass Community Action Partnership will conduct a street count of homeless individuals in Franklin County on Thursday, as part of the 2010 Point-In-Time Count coordinated by Kentucky Housing Corporation, the state housing finance agency, and the Kentucky Interagency Council on Homelessness. The Point-In-Time Count is a survey of homeless persons in every county in the state.

If you would like to volunteer to help conduct this count, or if you are aware of homeless or precariously housed persons (persons tripled or doubled up) call or come by the office. For more information you may

contact Sharon West at 695-5615.

Bean soup lunch Thursday

The Red Cross' 13th annual bean soup lunch fundraiser is 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Thursday at the VFW on Second Street.

Tickets cost \$5 each for a bowl of brown or white beans, cornbread, drink and dessert.

Carryout is available by calling in an order at 319-1281 or faxing 223-8380. The Red Cross will deliver to any location within Frankfort that has a minimum of 10 orders. Fax orders must be received no later than 10 a.m. Thursday.

All proceeds go to local disaster relief.

Stimulus funds going to transit

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (AP) — U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood has announced \$474,486 in federal funding for transit in Louisville.

A statement says the Transit Authority of River City will use the economic stimulus funds for operating assistance.

LaHood said rebuilding the nation's infrastructure is a "key part" of helping to rescue the economy.

The U.S. Department of Transportation is making \$48.1 billion available for highway and bridge, rail, transit, small shipyards and airport construction and repairs nationwide.



Welcome to wellness

The Frankfort Yoga Studio Community hosted a Wellness Fair in celebration of Yoga USA Day Saturday. More than 100 people came and tried or watched one of the 22 classes that are offered, from the many styles of yoga and tai chi to drumming, belly dancing and juggling.

The fair gave all ages an opportunity to learn about alternative ways to care for their body, mind and spirit, according to Julia Rome, owner of the Frankfort Yoga Studio.

There were more than 15 demonstrations and samplers to choose from all, of which are forms of movement and health modalities that are offered at the studio. There were also local vendors with herbs, honey, essential oils and more.

For more information on the Frankfort Yoga Studio Community go to the Web site at www.frankfortyoga.com, e-mail julia@frankfortyoga.com or call 227-3276.

Pictured: above, from left, Jim Swain, Marti Schmidt, Ed Stodola, Lisa Hicks, Laura Panayotoff and Jeff Ellis try hand drumming at the wellness fair. Left, Kaye Webb, a yoga belly dance instructor, poses during the wellness fair.

PHOTOS SUBMITTED