

Ex-Philadelphia congressman gets 10 years for corruption

By Maryclaire Dale

PHILADELPHIA (AP) - Former U.S. Rep. Chaka Fattah was sentenced Dec. 12 to a 10-year prison term by a judge who said he was "astonished" that a veteran legislator would steal government and charity funds to pay his son's debts and buy a vacation home.

Fattah, a Democrat who was born into a family of black activists in west Philadelphia, spent two decades in Congress working on housing, education, gun control and other issues of concern to his mostly poor district. Fattah and his TV anchor wife meanwhile took in more than \$500,000 a year.

Yet Fattah's finances grew increasingly dire after a failed 2007 run for mayor, when he faced new campaign spending limits that led him to take an illegal \$1 million loan from a friend. The trouble escalated when the friend called in the debt.

As he awaited his sentence, Fattah told the judge he had mixed emotions: saddened to find himself in court but grateful for the work he was able to do over 37 years as a state and federal lawmaker.

"I've helped tens of millions of people," said Fattah, 60. "(That) has nothing to do with the fact that I've been found on the wrong side of these questions by a jury."

Fattah lost the spring primary days before trial and resigned his seat following his June conviction. The jury found he took the \$1 million loan from the chairman of Sallie Mae, the student loan corporation. He returned \$400,000 of it and repaid some of the rest with federal grant money he had steered to an education nonprofit run by former aides.

The nonprofit efforts - including a NASA-funded mobile science classroom emblazoned with Fattah's name that roamed Philadelphia during the mayoral campaign - helped promote Fattah's political career, prosecutors said. Fattah was also ordered Dec. 12 to repay \$600,000 to Sallie Mae and NASA.

"For someone so interested in advancing education for the disadvantaged, you had the temerity to steal from the Educational Advancement Alliance, a nonprofit supported by government funds," U.S. District Judge Harvey Bartle said. "While you have done much good, you also engaged in grave and widespread criminal activity."

Four co-defendants who helped Fattah move government grants and other money between his campaign, the nonprofits and his consultants will be sentenced throughout the week.

Fattah used the money on campaign and personal expenses, the jury found. He put \$23,000 in nonprofit funds toward his son's college loans and took an \$18,000 bribe to try to help a friend become an ambassador. Fattah and his wife used that money for a down payment on a Poconos vacation home. They told authorities it covered the friend's purchase of a Porsche owned by Fattah's wife, but the Porsche never left their garage.

Fattah had insisted the Justice Department had been out to get him and his family for years. He plans to appeal the conviction.

"There are so many people in this courtroom and outside that owe their success - and also are able to serve the community so much better - as a result of the congressman's influence, support and inspiration," said Joseph Quinones, a one-time high school dropout who said that Fattah's encouragement led him to earn a master's degree from the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School.

The congressman's son is serving a five-year prison term in an overlapping fraud case that went to trial last year. Chaka "Chip" Fattah Jr. was convicted of using fraudulently obtained business loans to fund his jet-set lifestyle.

The elder Fattah, who earned \$174,000 as a congressman, is married to longtime Philadelphia news anchor Renee Chenault-Fattah. They have two school-age children. Chenault-Fattah spent 25 years with WCAU-TV before she resigned after the indictment named her a participant in the bribery scheme. She was never charged and has denied wrongdoing.

Fattah's co-defendants include former Philadelphia Deputy Mayor Herbert Vederman, of Palm Springs, Florida, who had sought the ambassadorship. Two political consultants pleaded guilty and testified at trial.

Prosecutors had asked for a 17- to 21-year sentence. The judge gave Fattah until Jan. 25 to report to prison.

Fattah entered Congress in 1995. Former state Rep. Dwight Evans, a fellow Democrat, now holds his seat.

Charlotte police officer seeks to maintain calm

By Michael Gordon
The Charlotte Observer

CHARLOTTE (AP) - Mike Campagna had just popped some gum in his mouth on Nov. 30 when he heard his name rising above the din on Trade Street.

"Mike! Mike! Where's Mike?"

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police major responded, and walked directly into a maelstrom.

Earlier in the day, District Attorney Andrew Murray had announced that the controversial police shooting of Keith Lamont Scott in September was legally justified. Scott's death had set off two days of tense and occasionally violent demonstrations. As expected, Murray's decision that his office would not bring charges brought a smaller delegation of protesters back to uptown.

Campagna, 46, returned with them. Two months ago, he earned grudging praise from some of the demonstrators for being one of the only police officers willing to engage the angry crowd.

Building on that experience, the Charlotte native and 24-year CMPD veteran has launched a new police approach to future public demonstrations. It's called the "Constructive Conversation" unit.

On the night of Nov. 30, Campagna was one of about 15 CMPD officers who waded into the public anger and distrust fueled by social media that has lingered in the city since Scott's death. Some 50 officers have been hand-picked for the new unit. Their job is to engage protesters and build rapport one conversation at a time.

Now the new unit was about to be street tested. Hearing his name called out, Campagna stepped into a horseshoe of protesters and the cross-hairs of their cell phone cameras.

The crowd, led by activist Ashley Williams, pummeled Campagna with questions about the Sept. 21 shooting death uptown of protester Justin Carr. Prosecutors have indicted a suspect in the killing; Williams, co-founder of Charlotte Uprising, and others still claim Carr's death was caused by a rubber bullet fired by cops.

Williams dominated the exchange, her voice bullhoming allegations at the officer, from the absence of the bullet that allegedly killed Carr to the lack of gunpowder burns on Carr's body. "You answer me NOW!" she shouted.

Campagna, who had been chewing his gum and nodding his head occasionally, tried to respond.

"You don't have all the facts, and that's OK," he began.

The collective roar drowned him out. Williams' voice rose again.

"F--- you," she told Campagna. "You're a liar."

The confrontation burned across social media. A photograph showing Campagna facing the crowd appeared on the website of the New York Times.

Two days later, the major watched an Observer video of the moment with little reaction. Asked to critique his handling of the encounter, he started with the gum. He hates how it makes him look. And then there's his answer - he'd like to have it back.

"I would not say, 'You don't have the facts,'" he began. "But that is a factual statement. They don't have the facts in the Justin Carr case."

Campagna, however, is well aware that police now operate in an environment where facts often clash.

"Sometimes you get a question but you come to see that they don't want an answer," he said. "And if you try to answer, there's nothing you can say."

"Sometimes, you have to set the facts aside and deal with the emotion, figure out what people are feeling and why."

Eventually, he said, the conversation has to swing back to the facts, if any can be agreed upon.

Here are two key ones from his perspective: Police weren't using rubber bullets the night that Carr was killed, he said; even if they had, a rubber bullet could not have caused the damage detailed in Carr's autopsy.

Campagna has personal experience in standing alone before a hostile crowd, speaking what he believes to be the truth. CMPD has some 1,800 employees. Inside the department, few are more controversial than Campagna.

Difficult conversations

In 2013, Randall "Wes" Kerrick became the first Charlotte police officer in more than three decades charged over an on-duty shooting. At Kerrick's 2015 trial, Campagna, one of CMPD's experts in the use of lethal force, became the only department member to testify that Kerrick committed a crime.

Kerrick was justified in pulling his gun against the approaching and unarmed Jonathan Ferrell, he said, but Kerrick had used excessive force in opening fire.

Kerrick's attorneys put other CMPD personnel on the stand to point out contradictions in how the department's officers had been trained to use their weapons. They portrayed Campagna as nitpicking the life-and-death decisions of a fellow officer.

The case ended in a mistrial, with the majority of the jury opting for acquittal. The black community felt betrayed. Many police officers, who never felt Kerrick should have been charged, focused some of their anger on Campagna. He was pilloried on social media as a turncoat.

While they won't talk on the record, several sources familiar with the department say the officer remains damaged in the eyes of the department's rank and file. Campagna, now CMPD's head of training and recruitment, acknowledges as much.

"People who know me may not have agreed with my testimony but they could accept it," he says. "But there are a lot of officers who don't know me, and I know that was very troubling for them."

The fallout lingers. Yet the episode gave Campagna a preview of having a difficult conversation with an unfriendly audience. He acknowledges that his testimony against Kerrick became a "heated" issue within his own command. When he offered his officers a chance to discuss their grievances with him in private, none of them showed.

Less than a year after his testimony, Campagna found himself walking up Trade Street with a large group of demonstrators angry about another police shooting of a black man, this time Keith Scott. An idea that had surfaced over the summer took fuller shape in his mind.

"What I kept hearing those nights was 'Capt. Mike is great, but the rest of those guys are jerks.' That's not a fair assessment of our police department," which he says is filled with people who want to engage.

The "Constructive Conversation" unit was born.

Police already are taught lessons on communication, body language and effective listening as part of their daily jobs. Now, using those skills "with people who really don't like us, who are outraged and angry - well, I don't know if that's been done anywhere else," he says.

Sgt. Chris Kopp, one of the "conversation" officers on duty Nov. 30, said the goal was not control but engagement. He said he was pressed by those on hand to account for CMPD's use of force and other policies that he can't control. At the same time, he said it was important to show the public that "we don't have all the answers," but were willing to hear the critics out.

Walking away, said Lt. Zeru Chickoree, is not an option.

Campagna said the officers must "weather the storm of outrage" until the speakers realize police are actually listening. Then a conversation may begin.

"If we have a person who's very loud and very animated, that doesn't necessarily make them threatening," he said.



Former U.S. Rep. Chaka Fattah

Bill Clinton, Lynch lead memorial for ex-AG Janet Reno

By Curt Anderson

MIAMI (AP) - Former Attorney General Janet Reno, the first woman to hold the top Justice Department job who died last month, never took the easy way out when making the tougher decision was the right thing to do, ex-President Bill Clinton said at a memorial service Dec. 11.

Clinton, who appointed Reno in 1993, told several hundred friends, family and colleagues that she didn't believe in political expediency or cutting corners.

"I don't believe Janet Reno ever cut a corner in her life. Not as a prosecutor and not as a person," Clinton said.

The service was held at a Miami-Dade College campus not far from the Reno family home, where Reno died Nov. 7 at age 78 from complications from Parkinson's disease. She had battled the disease for 20 years, including most of her time as attorney general.

Current U.S. Attorney General Loretta Lynch says Reno was a trailblazer for women and minority lawyers, recalling a conference early in her tenure as attorney general for African-American lawyers that proved pivotal for Lynch. In those days, Lynch recalled, "main Justice" - as the department's headquarters is widely known - was the territory of mostly older white men.

"She made us feel valued. She made us feel that we could do anything. And that was her gift," Lynch said. "I was inspired by her. I wanted to be like her."

Reno was involved in many major and controversial 1990s issues, including the deadly raid on the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas, the controversial return to Cuba of 5-year-old Elian Gonzalez and the Clintons' Whitewater probe. She also led the department through many major prosecutions, including the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing case, the capture of "Unabomber" Theodore Kaczynski and the 1993 World Trade Center bombing.

Clinton said the 1993 standoff in Waco was one of the most difficult moments of his young presidency when, with Reno leading the way, the decision was made to storm the compound amid allegations that children there were being abused during a 51-day standoff. The buildings caught fire and burned to the ground, killing 76 people including many children.

Reno, Clinton said, never wavered in taking responsibility.

"She didn't wait. She knew it was a disaster. She went out and said 'I made the decision. It's my responsibility,'" Clinton said. "That's what she did for eight years. Up and down and up and down, she was there."

President Barack Obama sent a letter of condolences and former U.S. Sen. Bob Graham of Florida also attended, with Clinton recalling that Graham was the first person to suggest Reno for the attorney general's position.

The audience included many current and former state and federal prosecutors who worked with Reno over the years. Reno was Miami-Dade County's top prosecutor before she was elevated to attorney general by Clinton, and after leaving Washington she ran unsuccessfully for governor of Florida.

Many people may also remember Reno as the subject of a recurring "Saturday Night Live" skit in which comedian Will Ferrell poked fun at her admittedly awkward style with "Janet Reno's Dance Party." Reno appeared on the skit after leaving the Justice Department in 2001.

Family and friends said in person Reno was warm, funny and compassionate, and she died in bed at home

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