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## FBI Says It Saw Jefferson Take Cash

Affidavit Details Sting on Lawmaker

By Allan Lengel  
Washington Post Staff Writer  
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Rep. William J. Jefferson (D-La.), the target of a 14-month public corruption probe, was videotaped accepting \$100,000 in \$100 bills from a Northern Virginia investor who was wearing an FBI wire, according to a search warrant affidavit released yesterday.

A few days later, on Aug. 3, 2005, FBI agents raided Jefferson's home in Northeast Washington and found \$90,000 of the cash in the freezer, in \$10,000 increments wrapped in aluminum foil and stuffed inside frozen-food containers, the document said.

The 83-page affidavit, used to raid Jefferson's Capitol Hill office on Saturday night, portrays him as a money-hungry man who freely solicited hundreds of thousands of dollars in bribes, discussed payoffs to African officials, had a history of involvement in numerous bribery schemes and used his family to hide his interest in high-tech business ventures he promoted in Cameroon, Ghana and Nigeria.

In one instance, at an unidentified D.C. restaurant, Jefferson exchanged cryptic notes with investor Lori Mody and discussed illegal kickbacks for his children in a telecommunications venture in Nigeria in which she had invested.

"All these damn notes we're writing to each other as if we're talking as if the FBI is watching," he told Mody, who was wearing an FBI wire.

About 15 FBI agents, wearing suits, entered Jefferson's office in the Rayburn House Office Building about 7:15 p.m. Saturday night and left about 1 p.m. yesterday. Authorities said it was the first time the FBI had raided a sitting congressman's office.

The affidavit was the most damaging material to date in the FBI investigation of Jefferson, 59, who has not been charged and has maintained his innocence. He is also the subject of a House ethics committee inquiry.

Earlier this year, Jefferson's attorneys explored the possibility of a plea agreement, according to those familiar with the talks. Jefferson changed attorneys recently and has issued vehement denials of wrongdoing as federal investigators move closer to deciding whether to seek his indictment.

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"As I have previously stated, I have never, over all the years of my public service, accepted payment from anyone for the performance of any act or duty for which I have been elected," he said this month. His press secretary, Melanie Roussel, declined to comment yesterday.

Jefferson's attorney Robert P. Trout called the raids outrageous, saying disclosure of the previously sealed affidavit was "part of a public relations agenda and an attempt to embarrass" Jefferson. "The affidavit itself is just one side of the story which has not been tested in court."

The FBI declined to comment, and Ken Melson, the first assistant U.S. attorney in Alexandria, said, "We don't care to comment on that statement."

The FBI probe began in March 2005 after Mody became concerned that Jefferson and others were trying to defraud her of millions of dollars that she had invested in iGate Inc., a Louisville high-tech company, the affidavit said. That was when the FBI and the U.S. attorney's office in Alexandria set up a sting.

Since January, Brett M. Pfeffer, a former Jefferson aide who worked for Mody, and Vernon L. Jackson, the owner of iGate Inc., have pleaded to guilty to bribing the eight-term congressman to promote iGate's broadband technology -- including Internet and cable television -- in Africa.

According to the affidavit, during one of many recorded conversations with Mody, Jefferson said he knew a businessman who was "corrupt" but was interested in investing in the iGate project in Africa.

"He thinks it's great," he said. "He can easily be involved in this."

In another instance, Jefferson said someone, identified in court papers only as "John Doe #1," needed money to bribe "various officials in Nigeria."

"We got to motivate him real good," Jefferson told Mody. "He got a lot of folks to pay off." Later in the conversation, he says: "If he's got to pay Minister X, we don't want to know. It's not our deal. We're not paying Minister X a damn thing. That's all, you know, international fraud crap."

On July 21, 2005, Jefferson told Mody that he would need to give Nigerian Vice President Atiku Abubakar \$500,000 "as a motivating factor" to make sure they obtained business contracts for iGate and Mody's company in Nigeria. The vice president is not mentioned by name in the affidavit, but other court documents make it clear it is he.

A few days later, they talked about passing on a smaller amount of money. But Jefferson refrained from actually using the word "money" and pointed to the word "cash" written on a piece of paper.

A short time later, at about 8:30 a.m., Jefferson and Mody met at the Ritz-Carlton Pentagon City in Arlington -- the same hotel where Linda Tripp secretly recorded Monica S. Lewinsky -- and went to Mody's car trunk.

"At that time, Congressman Jefferson reached in and removed a reddish-brown colored leather briefcase which contained \$100,000 in cash" as FBI agents filmed the transaction from different vantage points, the affidavit said.

Jefferson then put it his 1990 Lincoln Town Car and drove off, the affidavit said. A few days later, FBI agents seized \$90,000 in marked bills from Jefferson's freezer.

The affidavit does not indicate whether Jefferson ever passed any of the money to the Nigerian vice president, with whom he had met a couple of weeks earlier at Abubakar's Potomac home, according to court documents. Abubakar did not return a phone call to his home seeking comment.

Earlier in 2005, shortly after Mody started taping the conversations with Jefferson, she asked him how long he planned to stay in Congress.

Jefferson replied, "I'm going to get your deal out of the way . . . and I probably won't last long after that."

*Staff writer Martin Weil contributed to this report.*

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