

Detroit City Council member under investigation for corruption

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Detroit City Council Member Monica Conyers is under investigation for allegedly accepting at least \$6,000 in bribes from Synagro Technologies Inc. in exchange for her support on a \$1.2 billion sludge contract.

Conyers has been offered a plea deal to a five-year felony charge. If she decides not to accept this deal, she may face indictment and prosecution.

In November 2007 the Detroit City Council voted 5-4 in favor of awarding the lucrative contract to the Texas-based company. The deal guaranteed Synagro the rights to manage the disposal of the city's sewage sludge for 25 years. The company would have built a modern facility to incinerate the sludge. Although the city currently incinerates some of its sludge, much is also stored in landfills, a practice that is not environmentally sustainable in the long-term.

As a result of a wide-ranging investigation into Detroit corruption, the FBI has uncovered evidence that Synagro obtained the contract by means of bribery. On January 26, James Rosendall, then vice president of Synagro, pleaded guilty to bribery. He cut a deal with federal investigators in which he agreed to name names in exchange for a reduced sentence. Rosendall implicated former Detroit mayor Kwame Kilpatrick, his father Bernard Kilpatrick and Conyers.

"People expected me to give things to get their support," Rosendall explained to a judge earlier this year.

The information provided by Rosendall also led investigators to Rayford Jackson, a Detroit developer and former Synagro consultant. On June 15, Jackson pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit bribery.

Although Jackson said that more than one city council member accepted bribes in exchange for voting

in favor of the contract, the plea agreement only makes specific reference to one suspect, identified as "Council Member A." Jackson refused to reveal the identity of Council Member A or any other accomplices in the conspiracy. Media reports from sources involved in the investigation have pointed to Conyers as this Council Member A.

In the plea, Jackson admitted to knowledge of four exchanges of money, all of which took place in the eastern district of Michigan. In each of these cases, unidentified "Courier A" transferred bribes directly to Council Member A, Jackson said. The amount involved in the first two transfers remains undisclosed. The second two consisted of \$3,000 apiece, for a minimum total for all transactions of more than \$6,000.

Although the plea deal does not identify Courier A, sources close to the investigation have told the *Detroit Free Press* that Jackson's brother, Lennie, hand delivered the money.

Lennie Jackson has agreed to plead guilty and name Council Member A. This would establish a direct link between the Synagro vice president and Conyers. In addition to Lennie Jackson's agreement to plead guilty, two other chains of this link, Rosendall and Rayford Jackson, have already pleaded guilty.

This is only the latest in a series of corruption scandals that have overtaken the Detroit city government.

The most recent and widely publicized scandal involved former Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick. Kilpatrick used millions of dollars of the bankrupt city's public funds to silence several police officers that had firsthand, eyewitness information of the mayor's extramarital affair with his former chief of staff, Christine Beatty.

In March 2008, the City Council voted 7-1 in favor of

a resolution urging the governor to remove Kilpatrick. Monica Conyers cast the lone dissenting vote, a risky political decision considering the extent to which voters of Detroit had been outraged by the Kilpatrick scandal. Conyers decision to publicly support the unpopular mayor can likely be attributed to her deep entrenchment within the incestuous Detroit political machine.

Conyers husband, John Conyers Jr., is the second longest serving member of the US House of Representatives, representing Michigan's 14th District, which includes parts of the City of Detroit. Although John Conyers is often perceived as one of the most "left-wing" elements in Washington, this is a misconception resulting from deliberate political posturing orchestrated by the Democratic Party apparatus.

By grandstanding against the war in Iraq, for example, John Conyers played an instrumental role in enabling the ruling class to channel mass opposition to the war into the Democratic Party, while the party itself colluded closely with the Bush administration and Republican Party in carrying out the imperial interests of finance capital. Conyers true colors are evidenced by his decision on July 23, 2007 to have several opponents of the war, including outspoken critic Cindy Sheehan, arrested for protesting outside his office in Washington.

The corruption in Detroit says much about the nature and role of the Democratic Party. The city government is controlled by individuals that speak on behalf—and in many cases are direct members—of a small layer of wealthy businessmen who have presided over the impoverishment of the vast majority Detroit's predominantly African-American population.

The control the Democrats have managed to exert over Detroit politics for four decades has been based on the misconception that these wealthy elites have a common interest with the working class due to racial identity.

In fact, the relationship of the layer that controls Detroit to the population as a whole has been fundamentally parasitic. Unemployment in Detroit currently stands at 22 percent, among the highest in the country. In May, unemployment for Michigan as a whole reached 14.1 percent, the highest of any state. According to the US Census Bureau, the poverty rate in Detroit for 2008 was 33.8 percent, meaning fully one third of Detroit workers live below the poverty threshold.

The crisis and corruption of the Democratic Party in Detroit reflects the fundamental conflict between the interests defended by all factions of the city government and the interests of the vast majority of the population.



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