

US Congressman Jesse Jackson Jr. pleads guilty to misuse of campaign funds

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Illinois Congressman Jesse Jackson Jr. and his wife, Chicago Alderman Sandi Jackson, pleaded guilty on Wednesday, January 20 to criminal charges stemming from the personal appropriation of \$750,000 from his political campaign fund. Jackson Jr., son of former civil rights figure Jesse Jackson, pleaded guilty as part of a deal with prosecutors. Widely published reports of extravagant spending on luxury items and frivolities by the Jacksons—until recently darlings of the pseudo-left layers in and around the Democratic Party—have shattered any remaining illusions as to their “progressive” credentials.

As part of Jesse Jackson Jr.’s plea deal, he agreed to plead guilty to one count of conspiracy to commit wire fraud, mail fraud, and false statements, and to give up his congressional seat in return for an end to further federal investigation of his finances. The judge in the case has recommended that he serve approximately four to five years in prison. Sandi Jackson pleaded guilty to one count of filing fraudulent income tax returns as part of a scheme to hide their ill-gotten wealth, a charge that carries a maximum sentence of three years in prison.

The investigation of Jackson’s use of campaign funds began on the heels of the investigation of the sale of Barack Obama’s former US Senate seat by Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich. It was discovered that Jackson was considered by the governor to be a potential buyer. Blagojevich, who was ultimately impeached and then jailed on corruption charges, tried to parlay his power to appoint a replacement for Obama into a cash payment or comfortable sinecure.

Details of the Jacksons’ spending provide insight into the petty corruption and avarice of a layer of middle-class politicians, including some who have traded on family connections to earlier civil rights history to

achieve their current positions. This is part of a process of degeneration that has seen erstwhile civil rights figures transformed into wealthy businessmen and television personalities and anointed by the media and the political establishment as supposed leaders of the African-American “community”. In their lifestyle and social position, there is little to distinguish these elements from the ruling circles they have joined. They have absolutely nothing in common with the workers and poor people they claim to represent.

Among the more ostentatious purchases the Jacksons have been accused of making are a gold-plated Rolex at a cost of \$43,350, a fedora once owned by Michael Jackson for \$4,600, \$7,058 on stuffed elk heads, and approximately \$12,000 on Bruce Lee and Jimi Hendrix memorabilia.

A considerable part of the money went to funding a lavish lifestyle, with almost \$61,000 spent on restaurants, nightclubs and lounges, \$17,000 on cigars, and over \$31,000 on airfare. More than \$45,000 was spent on appliances and renovations to the homes they maintained in Chicago and Washington, DC, with an additional nearly \$10,000 on furniture for the latter.

The Jacksons certainly lived better than the vast majority of their own constituents. Jesse Jackson Jr. has been the congressman for Illinois’s 2nd district since he won a special election in 1995. The district is considered a safe seat, and he has faced no real challenge since that time. The median income in the district is just under \$45,000.

The 2nd district also includes some of the poorest areas in the region, such as the suburb of Ford Heights, where the median household income is just under \$22,000 and 20.3 percent of households make less than \$10,000 per year. Ford Heights is home to more single mothers per capita than anywhere else in the United

States.

Sandi Jackson, alderman for Chicago's 7th ward, represented some of the same communities as her husband. Unlike any other serving alderman in Chicago, Sandi Jackson resided primarily in Washington, DC with her husband, occasionally flying into the city to be present for important city council votes.

Neighborhoods in her ward include South Shore, a community located along Lake Michigan with nearly 50,000 people, which has a median household income of just under \$28,000. The neighborhood of South Chicago, once home to the US Steel South Works, has a median income of \$31,164. Both neighborhoods saw their populations drop by nearly 20 percent over the last 10 years, as their largely black, working class populations fled to the suburbs as well as to the southern United States in search of work and affordable housing.

The promise of an end to the investigation of their finances was a major factor in the Jacksons' decision to plead guilty. They had long cultivated ties to the American corporate elite and were deeply enmeshed in the sordid politics of the Democratic Party. A deeper investigation would eventually turn up any number of embarrassing connections to other political figures. No doubt the Jacksons were prevailed upon to do the "right thing".

Since Jackson entered his guilty plea, some commentators have noted that he published a book on personal finance with his father in 1999 entitled *It's About the Money!* In the book, father and son offer patronizing advice to help workers become "financially independent," which they equated with access to capital. This is portrayed in the book as the contemporary equivalent to the end of slavery and segregation and winning the right to vote!

The vacancy created by Jesse Jackson Jr.'s resignation of his seat in the House of Representatives will be filled by a special election to take place on April 9. Among the leading candidates is Robin Kelly, a long-time Democratic Party operative who has been the recipient of significant support from New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg's super PAC, largely for her support of gun control legislation.

Following the show of support from Bloomberg for Kelly, Illinois State Senator Toi Hutchinson withdrew

from the race, citing a fear of splitting the "black vote," which could lead to the election of Debbie Halvorson, another local Democratic politician. Illinois Congressmen Danny Davis and Bobby Rush both then threw their support to Kelly. In none of this electoral horse-trading did the needs and interests of the district's working class factor as even a momentary distraction, underscoring yet again the bankruptcy of racial politics.



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