

Rep. Jefferson indicted on 16 charges

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across two continents,” Chuck Rosenberg, the U.S. attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia, said at a news conference yesterday.

Jefferson’s lawyer, Robert Trout, of Trout Cacheris, declared his client innocent. He said Jefferson “plans to fight this indictment and clear his name” and asked the public to withhold judgment.

Trout called into question allegations of quid pro quos, adding that the government did not allege that Jefferson promised any legislation, earmarks or government contracts.

Justice Department prosecutors say that Jefferson used his congressional office to enrich himself and his family trying to set up business interests in West Africa. He accepted nearly \$400,000 in bribes through 11 different criminal schemes since 2000 and sought many millions of dollars more.

The congressman will be arraigned on June 8 in Alexandria, Va.

The indictment comes after a two-year investigation, which nearly prompted a constitutional crisis when the FBI raided the lawmaker’s congressional office on Capitol Hill. A federal judge declared the search legal, though Jefferson’s lawyers have appealed.

Prosecutors allege that Jefferson had been scheming for bribes since 2000, when he sought to get a sugar plant built in Nigeria, and that the lawmaker used his staff to arrange meetings with executive-branch officials to steer aid to a Nigerian partner. In exchange, the indictment states, “Jefferson assisted Company E in causing \$187,230 to be wired from a bank account ... in Nigeria.”

In 2004, Rosenberg alleged that Jefferson solicited a bribe in a congressional dining room and asked for a 5 to 7 percent share of a company, with the stakes going to family members. He promised to perform official acts to promote that joint venture.

On July 18, 2005, Jefferson went alone to visit Nigerian Vice President Atiku Abubakar at his Potomac, Md. home, allegedly to hatch a plan to give Abubakar \$500,000 in cash and a portion of the profits from a joint venture in Nigeria partially controlled by companies connected to Jefferson.

Three days later, Jefferson told Lori Mody, an investor who already had begun cooperating with the FBI, about the deal. Mody handed over \$100,000 on July 30. In early August, Jefferson “secreted in his freezer \$90,000.00 of the \$100,000 in cash ... which was separated into \$10,000.00 increments, wrapped

in aluminum foil, and concealed inside various frozen food containers,” the indictment charges.

Neither Abubakar’s nor Mody’s name appears in the indictment, but they have been identified in past reports.

Nobody else was charged in the indictment, but Rosenberg said the investigation is continuing.

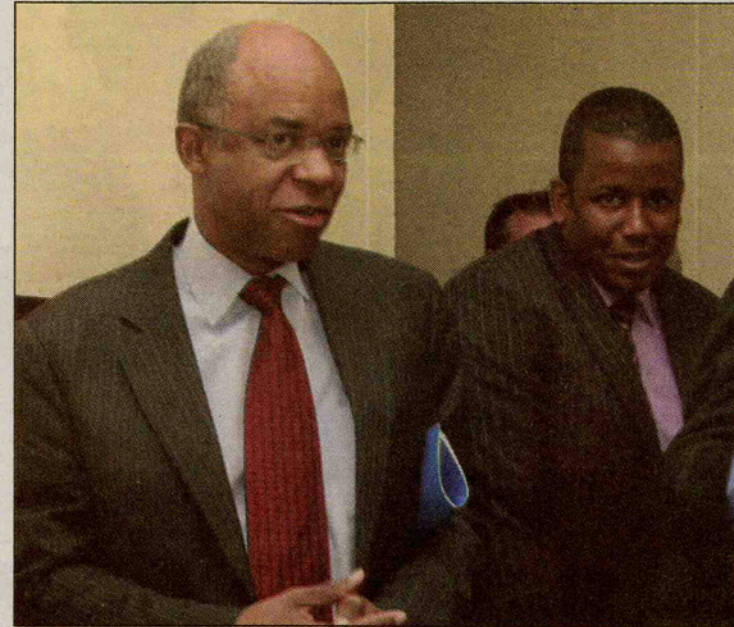
Jefferson is the first lawmaker to be indicted since 2001, when the Justice Department indicted then-Rep. James Traficant (D-Ohio), who is still serving a prison term. Former GOP Reps. Duke Cunningham (Calif.) and Bob Ney (Ohio) pleaded guilty during the last Congress before being indicted.

Democratic lawmakers generally responded cautiously to news that their colleague had been charged. Republicans called for Jefferson’s head. The Democratic Steering and Policy Committee will meet this week to vote on the lawmaker’s committee assignment, said a senior Democratic aide.

Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) issued a statement yesterday saying that if they were proven, “[The charges would] constitute an egregious and unacceptable abuse of public trust and power.”

She did not call for his resignation from Congress. But freshman Democratic Rep. Steve Kagen (Wis.) did so.

Minority Leader John Boehn-



LAUREN V. BURKE

Rep. William Jefferson (D-La.), left.

er (R-Ohio) said he would introduce a resolution as early as today to refer the indictment to the ethics committee and report within 30 days as to whether Jefferson should be expelled from the House.

The reaction from rank-and-file House Democrats was unclear. House leaders, returning from their districts and vacations, are expected to meet today, and the Democratic Caucus will meet on Wednesday.

Pelosi forced Jefferson off of the Ways and Means Committee after the FBI raided his office. He now serves on the Small Business Committee. He had moved earlier this year to win a place on the Homeland Security Committee, but he needed a vote by the full House to gain that seat. The vote did not take place.

Jackie Kucinich, Kevin Bogardus and Jeffrey Young contributed to this article.