

# Bribery Probe of Ex-Mayor Widens

## FBI uncovers new allegations of corruption

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A growing federal probe accuses eight-year East Palo Alto Councilman R.B. Jones of treating his elected office like his personal cash cow.

A federal grand jury indicted the former mayor April 26 for extorting bribes totaling \$12,000 from a San Jose water company and a Newark trucking firm seeking city contracts. After a water official tipped the FBI, agents covertly videotaped Jones allegedly accepting \$5,000 in marked \$100 bills in a December 1999 payoff.

The FBI probe is revealing widening allegations. According to court documents, Jones allegedly:

- Asked for a \$5,000 bribe from a taxi operator who paid him \$1,000.
- Requested \$4,500 from a man seeking a nightclub permit who paid him \$1,000.



**R.B. Jones**  
The city councilman and former mayor maintains his innocence and may seek re-election in November.

■ Solicited a \$14,000 payoff from a local trucking contractor.

■ Sought a \$20,000 bribe from a San Jose concrete distributor.

The outspoken Jones, who maintains his innocence, triggered cries for his resignation by resuming an active role on the council after a self-imposed leave following his May 2 arrest.

In a meeting at 6 tonight, Jones is expected to join council members reviewing the Ravenswood Business District Revitalization Plan — a lucrative 150-acre project boasting a bayside office park, homes and a revamped civic center — that has been sucked into the bribery scandal.

Defense attorney Harold Rosenthal said his African American client faces an unfair prosecution, driven by the FBI, an agency he says is rife

with a history of racism, and also driven by business people bitter over losing to competitors.

The probe raises questions about how Jones, a disabled paint distributor employee seeking a workers compensation settlement, makes his living. He owns a condominium, shares in two rental properties, and drives a 1996 Mercedes Benz sedan.

Court documents hint that Jones' passion for gambling has compounded his legal problems. In 1997, a self-described former mistress gave sworn testimony that she moonlighted as a prostitute at Nevada brothels from 1983 through 1991 "when Mr. Jones needed money for his gambling."

Now, federal investigators allege that Jones, who attends local social clubs and accepted campaign donations from one, in 1999 ordered police to halt crackdowns against illegal activity at so-called "bottle clubs."

John Hemann, the federal prosecutor in the bribery case, stated in recent court papers that last year then-Mayor Jones called an East Palo Alto police lieutenant and "threatened him after . . . police officers closed an East Palo Alto social

club."

According to the prosecutor, Jones told the lieutenant "he did not care whether the social club(s) . . . were operating illegally and that the police department was to leave them alone."

After 1993 raids by state and local authorities at four clubs suspected of illegal liquor sales, gambling, prostitution and drug dealing, Jones publicly stated: "I know for a fact that it's directed at me," and blasted the police for joining a political cabal against him.

Mayor Sharifa Wilson stressed that Jones is "innocent until proven guilty" and that none of the alleged bribery has landed anyone city business. But law enforcement sources and court documents show the FBI is scouring city contracts for corruption, including Jones' alleged admission that a trucking firm seeking to build a rock-crushing plant in the Ravenswood Industrial Area offered a bribe if Jones killed a rival trucking firm's cement plant that was eventually built.

Undaunted, the councilman has plans beyond his September 12 bribery trial. He has taken out papers to run for re-election in November.