



Ex-Rep. Ney gets 30-months in jail, \$6000 fine

Violation of public trust leads to harsher than recommended sentence

BREAKING NEWS

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WASHINGTON - Former Ohio Republican Representative Bob Ney, the only member of Congress to be criminally charged in the Jack Abramoff-lobbying scandal, was sentenced today to 30 months in prison and fined \$6,000 by U.S. District Judge Ellen S. Huvelle.

The Justice Department had asked for a term of 27 months in prison. The sentence was harsher than recommended by prosecutors or Ney's lawyers, Huvelle said, because Ney had violated the trust place on him as a public official. "Both your constituents and the public trusted you to represent them honestly," she said.

Ney apologized in the courtroom to his family, friends and constituents and said, "I will continue to take full responsibility, accept the consequences and battle the demons of addiction that are within me." He said, "I hope and pray that with time and love, our family can recover from the damage I have done."

The judge has recommended that Ney serve his sentence at the federal facility in Morgantown, West Virginia which has an alcohol abuse rehabilitation program. When he's released, Ney will serve another two years on probation.

Judge Huvelle strongly admonished the former Ohio lawmaker saying that he "betrayed the public trust," and that he had a "long way to go to make amends" for his actions. The judge opined, "what baffles the court is what went wrong...an alcohol problem doesn't explain everything."

A guilty plea

Ney pleaded guilty last October to conspiracy and making false statements.

He admitted that he traded official actions for disgraced lobbyist Abramoff for expensive trips, sports tickets, meals and campaign donations.

Abramoff is already in prison, serving 5 years for his role in the unrelated SunCruz gambling casino scandal. Justice Department officials say that he is continuing to cooperate in the Washington lobbying probe. Abramoff has yet to be sentenced for his role in bribing Ney in exchange for the former congressman performing official acts.

So far seven people --Abramoff, Ney and former associates Michael Scanlon, Tony Rudy, Neil Volz and Adam Kidan, and Interior Department official Roger Stillwell-- have pleaded guilty. Stillwell was sentenced to two-year probation. In June, David Safavian, the former top procurement officer at the Office of Management and Budget, was found guilty on four charges of making false statements and obstructing justice stemming from his dealings with Abramoff. He was sentenced to 18-months, but has appealed his conviction.

Pleas for leniency and severity

Prior to the sentencing, nine letters from citizens, most from Ohio, were sent to U.S. District Judge Ellen Huvelle and filed at court, asking the judge to impose the maximum sentence.

One letter said, "I beg you to give him at least 27 months and if possible put an extra 0 on his sentence behind the 7."

Another letter says, "If the punishment fit the crime, he'd be shot at sunrise."

Also filed are 95 pages of letters from supporters of Ney, including his sister, asking the judge to be lenient.

Ney's primary care physician, Dr. Renata Dela Cruz, wrote, "I became concerned that his use of alcohol was influencing his behavior."

'An albatross around his neck'

Emmylou Ney Charlton, Ney's older sister, asked the judge for leniency and writes, "Whatever he has done is now an albatross around his neck that is a constant reminder of a bright political future, now lost because of flaws in judgment and misplaced loyalties."

A former member of his congressional staff said that as the federal probe intensified in 2004 and 2005, Ney began to drink more heavily. Matthew Parker writes that Ney "could rarely make it through the day without drinking and would often begin drinking as early as 7:30 a.m."

Ney agreed to the Justice Department's offer to plead guilty to two counts, conspiracy to commit fraud and making false statements. He admitted in court papers that he accepted tens of thousands of dollars worth of trips and other perks from disgraced lobbyist Abramoff and an international businessman.

'I am ashamed'

After pleading guilty in court last October, Ney apologized for his actions in the written statement: "I accept responsibility for my actions, and I am prepared to face the consequences of what I have done.... I have made mistakes of judgment and acted in ways that I am not proud of. I never intended my career in public service to end this way, and I am ashamed that it has. I never acted to enrich myself or get things I shouldn't, but over time, I allowed myself to get too comfortable with the way things have been done in Washington, D.C. for too long."

The Associated Press contributed to this story.

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