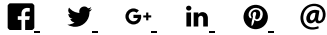




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## DA says Laboy used school workers to do his errands

By Jill Harmacinski Mar 10, 2010



LAWRENCE — Superintendent Wilfredo Laboy had a long list of errands for his on-the-clock school employees to do: electrical work at his Methuen home, taking out the household trash, chauffeuring his adult son to and from work, and picking up the grandchildren at school.

He also had employees design menus and magnets for his Methuen pizza shop on the taxpayers' dime and had them printed for free on the school's \$489,000 printing press.

And all the while, Laboy was making \$200,000 a year leading one of the poorest school districts in the country.

Those are the allegations made in the nine indictments handed down against Laboy by an Essex County grand jury yesterday. Nine months after police raids at his office and home, Laboy was charged with eight counts of fraud and embezzlement and a single count of illegal possession of alcohol on school property for the 16 bottles of liquor found in his office during the search.

Also indicted yesterday were Laboy's former right-hand man Mark Rivera, the failed mayoral candidate Israel Reyes, and his son with whom he shares his name and a pizza shop, Wilfredo Laboy II.

Rivera stands charged with seven counts of larceny of property over \$250, while Reyes faces two counts of the same charge. Wilfredo Laboy II is charged with a single count of perjury. All four are expected to be arraigned tomorrow in Salem Superior Court.

While Laboy, 59, is accused of using school employees at his and his family's behest over the past six years, Rivera and Reyes are charged with illegal use of the School Department's graphic design department and printing press.

Rivera instructed School Department graphic designers to produce literature and fliers for then-state Rep. William Lantigua, who is now the mayor of Lawrence; state Rep. Barry Finegold, who ran for Congress in 2007; Reyes, who ran unsuccessfully for mayor last fall; and local School Committee candidates Peter Larocque, Greg Morris, Priscilla Baez, who is Rivera's sister, and Omaira Mejia, according to the indictments.

Similarly, Rivera told the School Department graphic designers to produce and print copies of seminar materials, fliers, brochures, invitations and other documents for the Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents, a national group Laboy was named president of in 2005, prosecutors said.

Reyes stands accused of directing the School Department graphic designers to print campaign literature for himself and Finegold, prosecutors said.

Investigators said many of the candidates were unaware the printing jobs were being done with school resources on their behalf. Last night, Lantigua categorically denied any knowledge of literature being printed in the School Department on his behalf.

He said several months ago he was asked "general questions" by the Essex district attorney's office. If they had evidence against him, he said, "I would be in the same boat as they are now."

Finegold has said repeatedly he had no knowledge that his political literature was printed in the Lawrence School Department and that he would reimburse the district if necessary. Larocque previously publicly apologized and reimbursed the district for campaign fliers printed for him.

Years of speculation

Laboy did not answer the door at his Howe Street home in Methuen yesterday. His attorney, Scott Gleason, did not return calls seeking comment. Neither Reyes nor his attorney could be reached. Wilfredo Laboy II was working at his father's Sal's Pizza franchise on Howe Street in Methuen yesterday but also had no comment.

"I don't have anything to say. Get out of my place of business," he told an Eagle-Tribune reporter and photographer.

Rivera's attorney, Murat Erkan of Andover, urged the public "to keep an open mind. There are two sides to every story. We expect he'll be vindicated."

The indictments were handed down yesterday, nine months after Lawrence police and the Essex district attorney's office launched a raid on School Department offices as well as Laboy's Methuen home at 106 Howe St. Detectives, investigating "financial improprieties," seized several computers and files, as well as found 16 bottles of alcohol kept in an "unlocked armoire" in Laboy's office.

The indictments follow years of speculation about financial improprieties and misuse of School Department resources by the Laboy administration.

"The crimes alleged involved a serious violation of the public trust," said District Attorney Jonathan Blodgett.

Blodgett said the investigation continues and further indictments against these four people and others is possible. He and police Chief John Romero declined further comment until after Thursday's arraignments.

#### Calls to remove Laboy

Teachers Union President Frank McLaughlin last night made a repeated call for the School Committee to immediately "remove Laboy from office."

"This entire sad affair has needlessly distracted the city from our most important job of educating our kids," said McLaughlin. "There's nothing more important."

A School Committee meeting is scheduled for tomorrow night to discuss suspending and firing Laboy.

Laboy has been on leave since June, but he still collects about \$4,000 a week in vacation and sick time.

First hired in 2000 to run Lawrence schools, Laboy previously announced he planned to retire in October 2010. If convicted of criminal charges, Laboy's publicly-funded pension could be in jeopardy.

Rivera served as Laboy's right-hand man until he resigned as the superintendent's special assistant in April. A year ago, Rivera admitted to using School Department software to run improper background checks on everyone from celebrities to professional athletes to local politicians and newspaper reporters.

In September, a state watchdog agency concluded that Laboy, Rivera and Reyes either used or authorized the misuse of the School Department's printing press and other resources during the 2006 city election. In a letter to Reyes, the state agency said it had evidence that Reyes was involved in a "concerted effort" to print fliers and other campaign materials for four School Committee candidates and Finegold — charges Reyes denied.

The state's Office of Campaign and Political Finance sent the matter to the attorney general's office for further investigation.

Reyes was one of 10 vying for the mayor's job in September. When he lost in the September primary, he threw his support to Lantigua.

Laboy opened the Sal's Pizza franchise in Methuen in November 2008. He listed his son as the manager.

Staff reporter Mark Vogler contributed to this story.

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