

Datestamp: 01/07/2010

3 indicted in Yonkers vote–selling scam

Former Yonkers Councilwoman Sandy Annabi sold her vote "for baubles and trinkets," federal authorities said Wednesday as she and two political insiders were indicted on extortion and corruption charges.

Along with Annabi, the indictment charges former Yonkers Republican Chairman Zehy Jereis and lawyer Anthony Mangone with extortion, tax evasion and conspiracy to commit bribery.

Annabi, a 39–year–old Democrat, is accused of accepting more than \$160,000 in "secret payments" that included cash, house and car payments, airline freebies, a Rolex watch and diamond–encrusted jewelry.

"She willingly and willfully conspired with Jereis and Mangone to redefine her job from council member to council member–for–sale," said Joseph Demarest, the assistant director in charge of the FBI's New York office.

Annabi is alleged to have taken bribes in exchange for casting deciding votes supporting two major Yonkers developments that she had previously opposed.

Jereis, Annabi's cousin, peddled her council votes on the \$630 million Ridge Hill project and the Longfellow schools project for the payouts and a consulting job, according to the 43–page indictment unsealed in U.S. District Court in White Plains.

In turn, it is alleged, Jereis paid Annabi's utility bills and gave her nearly \$70,000 for two Yonkers houses and a co–op apartment on Rumsey Road in the city.

Annabi "betrayed Yonkers residents by selling the most important assets any elected official has: her integrity and her independence," U.S. Attorney Preet Bharara said.

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The Rumsey Road apartment served as Annabi's address within her district – state and city law requires council members to live within the boundaries of the districts they represent. But Annabi actually lived in one of her two houses elsewhere in the city, the indictment said.

She also is charged with falsifying information on loan applications for the two houses and providing phony pay stubs, federal tax forms and bank statements to gain favorable financing for mortgages.

Annabi, Mangone and Jereis pleaded not guilty during their arraignments Wednesday afternoon. Outside court, Annabi's lawyer, Stacey Richman, said the charges were false.

"We maintain our absolute innocence," she said, declining to comment further.

The charges center on the Longfellow and Ridge Hill projects and Annabi's decisive votes in both, although the developers are not identified by name in the indictment.

Forest City Ratner issued a statement saying it had "cooperated fully with the U.S. Attorney's Office during the course of its investigation and will continue to do so."

"In addition, Forest City has been advised by the U.S. Attorney's Office that neither the company nor any of its employees is a target of the investigation," the statement said.

During the news conference, Bharara declined to comment on whether Forest City Ratner had broken the law by hiring Jereis or whether they were a target of the continuing investigation.

Franco Milio, owner of Milio Management Inc., the development company for the Longfellow project, did not return calls seeking comment.

Annabi, Mangone and Jereis each face up to 20 years in prison if convicted of extorting Milio Management. Annabi also faces up to 30 years if convicted of lying on her mortgage applications.

The indictment accuses Jereis of arranging a June 9, 2006, meeting between Annabi and representatives of the Ridge Hill developer. At the end of the meeting, Jereis asked the developer for a consulting job, prosecutors said.

Indicted

Sandy Annabi

Age 39. Was on Yonkers City Council from 2002 to 2009, serving as Democratic majority leader when she was forced to step down due to term-limit restrictions. She sought to unseat Westchester County Legislator Jose Alvarado in November but lost in a tight race. She told The Journal News in past interviews that she and Zehy Jereis were cousins.

Zehy Jereis

Age 38. Served as Yonkers Republican Party chairman from 2003 to 2007. Worked for former Westchester County Clerk Leonard Spano and later as an aide to Spano's son, former state Sen. Nicholas Spano, Jereis' political patron and once one of the county's most powerful politicians. In 1998, Jereis pleaded guilty to falsely witnessing election nominating petitions. He pleaded guilty to misdemeanor marijuana charges in 1994.

Anthony Mangone

Age 36. Politically connected lawyer who served as counsel and top aide to state Sen. Nicholas Spano. In

2002, Mangone was embroiled in a ballot-rigging scandal, and admitted to opening sealed absentee ballots and writing in Spano's name. He agreed to plead guilty to misdemeanor charges but was never prosecuted. In 2006, he was hired by Milio Management Inc. in the developer's bid to win city approval for the Longfellow project.

From the indictment

A table of information from the indictment identified as "United States v. Sandy Annabi, Zehy Jereis, and Anthony Mangone, Defendants."

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Date	Benefit	Amount
May 5, 2004	JEREIS check to ANNABI; money used for down payment on purchase of Patton Drive, Yonkers, NY	\$50,000
June 8, 2004	JEREIS check to ANNABI; money used for down payment on purchase of ' Bacon Place, Yonkers, NY	\$10,000
Nov. 30, 2004	JEREIS check to ANNABI; money used for down payment on purchase of co-op apartment at Rumsey Road, Yonkers, NY	\$7,200
Feb. 10 and 14, 2005	JEREIS made 2 payments to a real estate attorney on ANNABI's behalf for her closing on Rumsey Road, Yonkers, NY	\$11,500
Sept. 27, Dec. 8, 2005	JEREIS made 2 payments to Ray Catena Mercedes on ANNABI's behalf	\$10,000
Jan. 2004 – Jan. 2006	JEREIS made 21 payments for ANNABI's student loan	\$7,378.14
April 2005 – Aug. 2008	JEREIS made 36 payments for ANNABI's mortgage at Rumsey Road, Yonkers, NY	\$14,627.62
April 2005 – Aug. 2008	JEREIS made 39 payments for ANNABI's monthly maintenance charge at Rumsey Road, Yonkers, NY	\$20,199.73
Sept. 2005 – Aug. 2008	JEREIS made 31 payments for ANNABI's Cablevision service at Rumsey Road, Yonkers, NY	\$4,879.95
Jan. 2006 – Aug. 2008	JEREIS made 28 payments for ANNABI's Con Edison service at Rumsey Road, Yonkers, NY	\$1,173.02
June 2006	MANGONE and JEREIS gave cash to ANNABI	\$30,000
TOTAL:		\$166,958.46