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## Bribery charges stand in case against Scruggs

By By Chris Talbott  
Associated Press

Thursday, February 21, 2008

OXFORD -- Powerful plaintiffs attorney Richard "Dickie" Scruggs tried to use his brother-in-law, former U.S. Sen. Trent Lott, to influence the ruling of a sitting Mississippi judge, a government witness testified Wednesday in federal court.

The testimony about Lott came during a hearing in a separate federal case in which Scruggs, his son Zach, and law partner Sidney Backstrom are charged with trying to bribe Circuit Judge Henry Lackey to get a favorable ruling in a dispute over \$26.5 million in legal fees.

Lott is not charged with any wrongdoing in either case.

U.S. Dist. Judge Neal Biggers Jr. refused Wednesday to dismiss the charges against Scruggs and others in the alleged bribery attempt involving Lackey. A trial is scheduled to start March 31.

Former New Albany attorney Timothy Balducci, who has pleaded guilty to a conspiracy charge and is helping prosecutors in their case against Scruggs, brought up Lott's name during his testimony.

Prosecutors say Balducci approached Lackey with a "bribe overture" last year. The judge reported the attempt and worked undercover for the FBI. Balducci allegedly delivered \$40,000 to Lackey in three installments between last September and November.

When asked if he was sure Scruggs was actively involved in the conspiracy, Balducci said yes.



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## Lott may be called in case

### Former senator's brother- in-law faces bribe charges

By By Chris Talbott  
Associated Press

Friday, February 22, 2008

OXFORD -- Both the defense and prosecution in the federal bribery case against famed plaintiffs attorney Richard "Dickie" Scruggs and his associates plan to call retired U.S. senator Trent Lott to the stand if a judge allows testimony about Scruggs' "prior bad acts" in the upcoming trial.

U.S. Dist. Judge Neal Biggers Jr. is considering whether to allow testimony about what a federal witness called a bribery attempt of Hinds County Circuit Judge Bobby DeLaughter in an unrelated case.

It was the second time during a two-day hearing to deal with several motions that the former Republican senator's name was brought up in connection with Scruggs, his brother-in-law.

Witness Timothy Balducci, who has pleaded guilty to a federal bribery charge and is cooperating with the prosecution, said Wednesday that Lott called DeLaughter on Scruggs' behalf and told the judge that he would put him on the list of potential candidates for federal judgeship vacancies if he made a favorable ruling in a case involving a dispute over legal fees.

DeLaughter has not been charged with a crime.

Scruggs, his son and law partner Zach, and attorney Sidney Backstrom are accused of trying to bribe another judge to get a favorable ruling in a dispute over \$26.5 million in legal fees from a mass settlement of Hurricane Katrina insurance lawsuits.

A trial is set to begin March 31.

Richard Scruggs, who made hundreds of millions of dollars from taking on tobacco, asbestos and insurance companies, could get 75 years in prison if convicted.

The prosecution would like to introduce the claim that the Scruggs Law Firm bribed DeLaughter to show the jury that the elder Scruggs had a history of trying to influence judges before he allegedly conspired to pay Lafayette County Circuit Judge Henry

Lackey \$40,000 to send the dispute to arbitration.

Lott has denied to The Associated Press through a spokesman being involved in any bribery attempt of DeLaughter. The former senator said the judge, who also has told the AP he has done no wrong, was among several people Lott made courtesy calls to about a vacancy in the federal court system. Lott recommended Gulf Coast attorney Sul Ozerden for the post.

Scruggs attorney John Keker and Assistant U.S. Attorney Robert Norman gave lists of who they would call if Biggers allowed testimony about the alleged bribe to DeLaughter. Lott's name came up both times.

Keker argued testimony about the alleged bribe attempt should be excluded because there is nothing illegal about a lawyer suggesting a judge for a federal posting. He also noted that DeLaughter is a Democrat, making it unlikely that he would be appointed by a Republican administration even if Lott used his considerable influence for his cause.

"If the government thinks this is a crime, they have a way to deal with it," Keker said. "They can bring a charge."

Biggers ruled Wednesday that there is enough evidence for the case to go to trial. Scruggs and the others have pleaded not guilty to counts including wire fraud and defrauding the federal government.

Biggers said he would rule shortly on whether to allow testimony during trial on the alleged bribing of DeLaughter and was scheduled Thursday afternoon to consider motions calling for change of jurisdiction and allowing the defendants to have separate trials.



## Judge to rule on severing cases

### Zach Scruggs asks to be tried separately

By By Chris Talbott  
Associated Press

Tuesday, February 26, 2008

OXFORD -- For most of his life, Zach Scruggs has benefited from his last name.

As a partner in his father Richard "Dickie" Scruggs' law firm, the younger Scruggs is entitled to millions in legal fees and the acclaim of working with one of the nation's most powerful and media savvy plaintiffs lawyers.

Now that he faces trial with his father and an associate on charges of conspiring to bribe a Mississippi judge, however, Zach Scruggs is in the unusual position of having to distance himself from Richard Scruggs.

A federal judge is expected to rule today on Zach Scruggs' request to have his case severed from his father's, among other key decisions on pending motions.

Despite the formal setting, the Scruggses' feelings showed through in court last week during a two-day motion hearing. They consulted during recesses, leaning in to each other to discuss strategy in quiet tones, and even greeted each other with a special handshake.

Yet in Zach Scruggs' best interests, his attorney argued his case should be separated from his father's because the name that has served him so well in the past now may stand in the way of his defense.

"The whole matter is difficult," Zach Scruggs' attorney, Todd Graves, said in an interview Sunday with The Associated Press. "It's a father-son relationship. He's concerned about his father, but at the same time, though, he's in this case and our contention is he should be tried separately in his own case."

The Scruggses, who declined comment for this story, and fellow defendant Sidney Backstrom have pleaded not guilty to defrauding the federal government and wire fraud, among other charges. Backstrom also is asking U.S. Dist. Judge Neal Biggers Jr. to separate his case from the others.

They are accused in a federal indictment of paying Lafayette County Circuit Court

Judge Henry Lackey \$40,000 to rule in their favor in a dispute over \$26.5 million in Hurricane Katrina insurance settlement fees. Lackey is not accused of wrongdoing and worked with federal investigators.

During last week's hearing, Graves told Biggers that he had counted the number of times attorneys, the judge and witnesses had distinguished between the senior Scruggs and his son during the proceedings and came up with only a handful.

He noted that all parties often had to clarify who they were talking about in the hearing and that wrongdoing was often attributed to the "Scruggs law firm" rather than to the individuals.

"That element of confusion could lead to prejudice," Graves argued.

Graves also argued that the cases against father and son should be split because of the "huge disparity" in evidence against the two. He argued evidence against Richard Scruggs seemed more substantial than that gathered against his client.

Biggers also will rule Tuesday on whether to allow testimony about Scruggs' participation in another alleged conspiracy to bribe Hinds County Circuit Court Judge Bobby DeLaughter.

Tom Dawson, first assistant U.S. attorney for the Northern District of Mississippi, said the DeLaughter bribery allegations are being investigated by the Public Integrity section at the U.S. Department of Justice. DeLaughter has not been named in any indictment and has denied wrongdoing.

"We have become aware of some evidence that might indicate that Zach Scruggs had some knowledge of the backdoor attempt to influence a judge," Dawson told the court.

Dawson also said Graves was understating Zach Scruggs' involvement in the alleged bribery of Lackey. He noted that federal witness Timothy Balducci, who has pleaded guilty in the conspiracy, testified Zach Scruggs was the lawyer who brought up the idea of Balducci approaching Lackey, his good friend, in an attempt to persuade him to rule in their favor.





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## Business

Feb. 20, 2008, 1:18PM

# Judge won't dismiss indictment of Mississippi attorney

Associated Press

OXFORD, Miss. — A federal judge today declined to dismiss an indictment in a judicial bribery case against powerful attorney Richard "Dickie" Scruggs and two others.

Scruggs, his son Zach and law partner Sidney Backstrom are accused of trying to bribe a judge to get a favorable ruling in a dispute over \$26.5 million in legal fees from a mass settlement of Hurricane Katrina insurance lawsuits.

U.S. District Judge Neal Biggers Jr. ruled that there is enough evidence against the three for the case to go to trial. They have pleaded not guilty to counts including wire fraud and defrauding the federal government.

Richard Scruggs, who made hundreds of millions of dollars from taking on tobacco, asbestos and insurance companies, could get 75 years in prison if convicted.

Three other defendants have pleaded guilty in the case: attorney Timothy Balducci; Richard Scruggs' former defense attorney Joey Langston; and former state Auditor Steve Paterson, a former business partner of Balducci's.

Biggers heard testimony from Balducci, who prosecutors say was the one who approached Circuit Judge Henry Lackey with a "bribe overture" last year. The judge reported the attempt and worked undercover for the FBI.

Balducci allegedly delivered \$40,000 to the judge in three installments between September and November. Richard Scruggs, Zach Scruggs and Backstrom say Balducci acted alone.

On the stand today, Balducci said Zach Scruggs suggested that Balducci have an off-the-record conversation with Lackey and persuade him to rule in their favor. After that discussion, Balducci said he met with Lackey on March 28.

On Tuesday, federal prosecutors filed with the court transcripts from some wiretaps to support their case. The transcripts appear to contain conversations secretly recorded by Balducci in which Richard Scruggs and others discuss the wording they want in Lackey's order in the fee dispute case.

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## Business

Feb. 20, 2008, 7:27PM

### DIGEST

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#### NATURAL GAS

##### Iran, Russia create joint company

Iran and Russia agreed to establish an energy venture as the countries seek new markets for their natural gas reserves, equal to more than 40 percent of the world's total.

Iran "reached an agreement with Gazprom to form a joint company with the participation of a third country," Oil Minister Gholamhossein Nozari told the official Shana news agency after a Tehran meeting this week with Gazprom CEO Alexei Miller. Nozari didn't name the third country.

Iran, holder of the world's second-largest gas reserves after Russia, has yet to build facilities for super-cooling the fuel into a liquid form capable of being shipped by tanker to overseas markets. Gazprom, Russia's state-run gas exporter, wants to help Iran develop LNG production, he said.

#### COURT

##### Katrina bribery case to proceed

OXFORD, MISS. — A federal judge on Wednesday declined to dismiss an indictment in a judicial bribery case against attorney Dickie Scruggs.

Scruggs, his son Zach and law partner Sidney Backstrom are accused of trying to bribe a judge to get a favorable ruling in a dispute over \$26.5 million in legal fees from a mass settlement of Hurricane Katrina insurance lawsuits.

U.S. District Judge Neal Biggers Jr. ruled that there is enough evidence against the three for the case to go to trial. They have pleaded not guilty.

#### PRIVATE EQUITY

##### KKR unit again puts off repayment

NEW YORK — A unit of Kohlberg Kravis Roberts & Co., one of the world's largest private-equity firms, on Wednesday said it has delayed payment on billions in loans and opened debt restructuring talks with creditors.

It was the second time the fixed-income fund KKR Financial Holdings, an affiliate of the U.S. buyout shop, has put off repaying asset-backed commercial paper.

The fund, which invests in corporate debt and mortgages, did not provide details of how much debt was affected, according to a filing with the Securities and Exchange Commission.



It was a further embarrassment for KKR following a \$270 million bailout in September of the leveraged investment vehicle amid a widening credit crisis that has swept through global financial markets.

## OIL

### Venezuela to get hearing on Exxon Mobil freeze

At a hearing in Great Britain next Wednesday, Venezuelan state energy company PDVSA will seek an end to a \$12 billion asset freeze obtained by Exxon Mobil, said Bernard Mommer, a board member.

Venezuela and the Irving-based oil company are locked in a legal battle over compensation after the country nationalized a heavy-oil project.

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## Markets

Feb. 25, 2008, 2:58PM

### Scruggs Son Wants to Be Tried Separately

By CHRIS TALBOTT Associated Press Writer  
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OXFORD, Miss. — For most of his life, Zach Scruggs has benefited from his last name.

As a partner in his father Richard "Dickie" Scruggs' law firm, the younger Scruggs is entitled to millions in legal fees and the acclaim of working with one of the nation's most powerful and media savvy plaintiffs lawyers.

Now that he faces trial with his father and an associate on charges of conspiring to bribe a Mississippi judge, however, Zach Scruggs is in the unusual position of having to distance himself from Richard Scruggs.

A federal judge is expected to rule Tuesday on Zach Scruggs' request to have his case severed from his father's, among other key decisions on pending motions.

Despite the formal setting, the Scruggses' feelings showed through in court last week during a two-day motion hearing. They consulted during recesses, leaning in to each other to quietly discuss strategy and even greeted each other with a special handshake.

Yet in Zach Scruggs' best interests, his attorney argued his case should be separated from his father's because the name that has served him so well in the past now may stand in the way of his defense.

"The whole matter is difficult," Zach Scruggs' attorney, Todd Graves, said in an interview Sunday with The Associated Press. "It's a father-son relationship. He's concerned about his father, but at the same time, though, he's in this case and our contention is he should be tried separately in his own case."

The Scruggses, who declined comment for this story, and fellow defendant Sidney Backstrom have pleaded not guilty to defrauding the federal government and wire fraud, among other charges. Backstrom also is asking U.S. District Judge Neal Biggers Jr. to separate his case from the others.

They are accused in a federal indictment of paying Lafayette County Circuit Court Judge Henry Lackey \$40,000 to rule in their favor in a dispute over \$26.5 million in Hurricane Katrina insurance settlement fees. Lackey is not accused of wrongdoing and worked with federal investigators.

During last week's hearing, Graves told Biggers he had counted the number of times attorneys, the judge and witnesses had distinguished between the senior Scruggs and his son during the proceedings and came up with only a handful.

He noted that all parties often had to clarify who they were talking about in the hearing and that wrongdoing was often attributed to the "Scruggs law firm" rather than to the individuals.

"That element of confusion could lead to prejudice," Graves argued.

Graves also said the cases against father and son should be split because of the "huge disparity" in evidence against the two. He said evidence against Richard Scruggs seemed more substantial than that gathered against his client.

"Their proof against Zach is so minimal," Graves said. "The proof that they're going to offer against his father would be a lot more than that. And our concern is a jury wouldn't be able to judge him based solely on the minimal proof (prosecutors) indicate they're going to offer at this point."

In one instance, he said the government claims Zach Scruggs took part in a recorded conversation about the alleged Lackey bribe on Nov. 1. Graves told the court, however, he doubted prosecutors could show Zach Scruggs was in the room for much of the conversation. That secretly recorded conversation included references to "sweet potatoes" \_ code, authorities say, for the money paid to Lackey.

"He was in the room for a very short period of time where the government alleges code words were being spoken," Graves said Sunday. "But if you're not part of the conspiracy, a code word doesn't mean anything to you."

Tom Dawson, first assistant U.S. attorney for the Northern District of Mississippi, took issue with Graves' description of the case against Zach Scruggs during the hearing. He said there was not only evidence that the younger Scruggs actively participated in the conspiracy, but that he also may have been a part of another bribery scheme.

Biggers also will rule Tuesday on whether to allow testimony about Scruggs' participation in another alleged conspiracy to bribe Hinds County Circuit Court Judge Bobby DeLaughter.

Dawson said the DeLaughter bribery allegations are being investigated by the Public Integrity section at the U.S. Department of Justice. DeLaughter has not been named in any indictment and has denied wrongdoing.

"We have become aware of some evidence that might indicate that Zach Scruggs had some knowledge of the backdoor attempt to influence a judge," Dawson told the court.

Dawson also said Graves was understating Zach Scruggs' involvement in the alleged bribery of Lackey. He noted that federal witness Timothy Balducci, who has pleaded guilty in the conspiracy, testified Zach Scruggs was the lawyer who brought up the idea of Balducci approaching Lackey, his good friend, in an attempt to persuade him to rule in their favor.

And he quoted a transcript of a recording Balducci made of a meeting that allegedly involved the Scruggses.

"Mr. Balducci says, 'Zach, let me bring you up to speed. This is on the Judge Lackey thing,'" Dawson said.

"The statement is made, 'We need to get this exactly right because we are paying for it.'"

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## Markets

Feb. 28, 2008, 9:53AM

### FBI: Scruggs Paid 2 Men to Persuade AG

By HOLBROOK MOHR Associated Press Writer  
© 2008 The Associated Press

JACKSON, Miss. — A prominent attorney embroiled in a judicial bribery case paid two associates \$500,000 to convince Mississippi's Attorney General not to file criminal charges against an insurance company, according to court records.

Plaintiffs lawyer Richard "Dickie" Scruggs, who sued State Farm Fire and Casualty Cos. soon after Hurricane Katrina in 2005, was afraid the company "was not going to settle the civil cases" if the attorney general's office filed criminal charges, according to an FBI report filed Monday in the bribery case.

Attorney General Jim Hood said Wednesday he would not have met with the men if he had known they were paid to persuade him not to file charges. "If I knew they were getting paid that much I would have told them to get out of the office because it just didn't smell right," Hood said.

Hood acknowledged meeting with former State Auditor Steve Patterson and attorney Timothy Balducci around Christmas 2006, but said he was not influenced by them.

"It was like they were fishing for information more than anything," Hood said. "I didn't get a dime, wasn't offered a dime and wouldn't have taken a dime."

Scruggs, Patterson and Balducci were indicted in November 2007, along with Scruggs' son and law partner Zach, and another attorney in the Scruggs' firm, Sidney Backstrom. The men were charged with conspiring to bribe a state court judge for a favorable ruling in a dispute over \$26.5 million in legal fees from a settlement of Katrina insurance cases.

Balducci and Patterson have pleaded guilty and are cooperating with investigators. The Scruggses and Backstrom have pleaded not guilty.

While being interviewed by the FBI in November 2007, Balducci told agents that Scruggs paid him and Patterson to see "if they could get Hood to relent on indicting" State Farm, according to the report filed in federal court on Monday.

John Kecker, an attorney for Scruggs, told The Associated Press on Wednesday: "I'm not going to talk about Balducci's claim until we get to the trial."

The FBI report, entered into federal court records in the bribery case against Scruggs and two associates, is based on an interview with a confidential source, apparently Balducci.

A judge on Tuesday ruled that he will allow evidence of prior bad acts, particularly that Scruggs allegedly tried to influence at least one other judge when the trial begins March 31.

The FBI document was filed Monday as part of a defense motion introducing a potential witness. It says Balducci accompanied Patterson, who had a long-standing relationship with Hood, to a

meeting in which the lawyers allegedly asked Hood not to charge State Farm.

"Hood later agreed not to indict," the report said.

Hood said the reason he didn't file criminal charges against State Farm at the time was because he didn't have enough evidence to prove the insurer violated state law.

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**HEARST** newspapers



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## Markets

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Feb. 29, 2008, 4:58PM

### Judge Tosses Ala. Case Against Scruggs

By JAY REEVES Associated Press Writer  
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BIRMINGHAM, Ala. — A federal judge dismissed a criminal contempt charge against Mississippi attorney Richard "Dickie" Scruggs on Friday, leaving the prominent lawyer with one less case to worry about as he fights a more serious bribery indictment.

U.S. District Judge Roger Vinson ruled that an Alabama court lacked jurisdiction to charge Scruggs with contempt for allegedly ignoring an order to turn over documents about insurance claims after Hurricane Katrina.

Also, Vinson said, Scruggs was protected from prosecution because he gave the papers to Mississippi's attorney general, Jim Hood, who was probing fraud allegations related to Katrina.

The decision was a clear victory for Scruggs, but it won't affect the case in Mississippi, where Scruggs is accused of conspiring to bribe a judge over \$26.5 million in attorney fees stemming from a huge settlement with State Farm insurance over Katrina claims.

Attorneys for Scruggs did not immediately return a telephone call seeking comment. Neither did U.S. District Judge William Acker, who initiated the contempt case against Scruggs.

Scruggs was accused of violating an order to surrender documents taken from the Alabama-based E.A. Renfroe and Co. Inc., which adjusted claims for State Farm insurance after Katrina.

Renfroe filed suit in Alabama seeking the records, which were taken by two sisters who worked for the company after the hurricane. The women provided documents to Scruggs, and Acker sought the prosecution of Scruggs after ruling he violated an order to return the papers to Renfroe.

The U.S. attorney's office in Birmingham declined to prosecute Scruggs, so Acker appointed special prosecutors who moved forward with the case. Vinson, from Pensacola, Fla., was brought in to preside after Alabama judges stepped aside.

In his decision, Vinson said he was troubled by Scruggs' actions. He said there was a "cloud of suspicion" surrounding Scruggs' decision to give the papers to Hood instead of Renfroe and Co.

But Scruggs can't be cited for criminal contempt since he wasn't formally involved in the Alabama case, Vinson said. Also, he said, Acker's order did allow for the documents to be turned over to law enforcement, and Hood qualifies as the Mississippi attorney general.

In Mississippi, Scruggs and four other men were indicted in November in the judicial bribery case. Two of the original defendants have pleaded guilty and are cooperating with authorities.

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# MARKET PERSPECTIVE 2006



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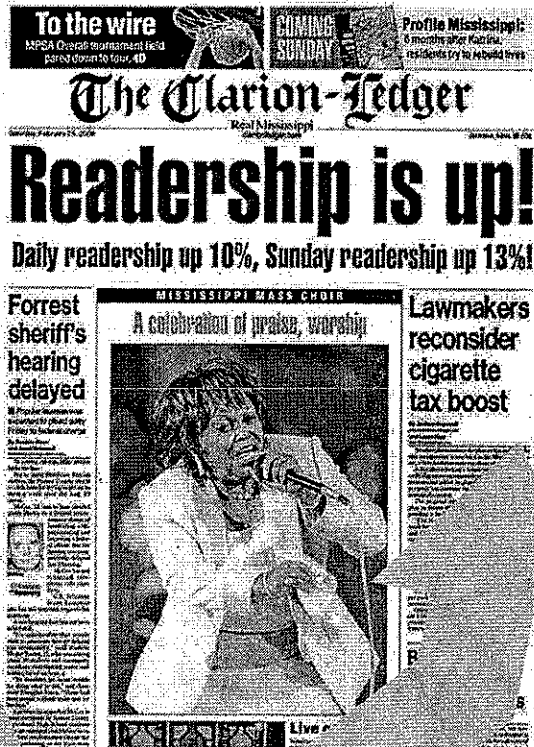
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Read in Past 7 days – 2003.....	213,000
Percent of total adults.....	65
Read in Past 7 days – 2005.....	234,200
Percent of total adults.....	70

In just two years, 27,700 more adults are reading the Sunday newspaper.

Read Sunday in past 4 weeks – 2003.....	206,500
Percent of total adults.....	63
Read Sunday in past 4 weeks – 2005.....	234,200
Percent of total adults.....	70

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Source: 2003 Market Study,  
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<b>Gender</b>		
Male	94,200	52%
Female	87,200	48%
<b>Age</b>		
18-34	74,000	41%
35-49	59,300	33%
50-64	34,400	19%
65+	13,600	7%
<b>Education</b>		
HS Grad or Less	34,500	19%
Some College	54,600	30%
College Grad/no post	91,500	50%
<b>HH Income</b>		
Less than \$25,000	23,600	13%
\$25k to \$34,999	22,600	12%
\$35k to \$49,999	24,400	13%
\$50k to \$74,999	41,900	23%
\$75k+	69,200	38%
<b>County</b>		
Hinds	76,300	42%
Madison	31,900	18%
Rankin	73,200	40%
<b>Race</b>		
Black	60,900	34%
White	110,200	61%

Source: 2005 Market Study.



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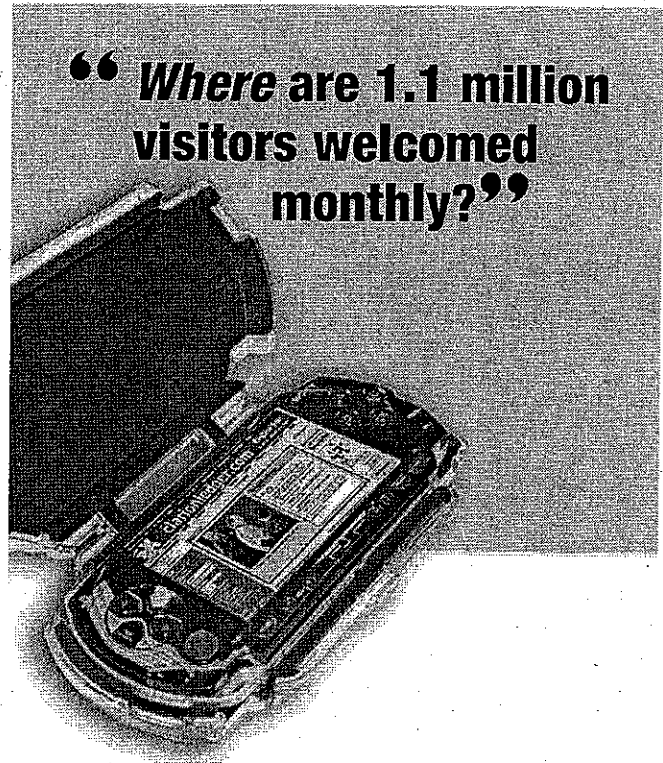
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65+	1,600	4%
<b>Education</b>		
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Some College	9,100	21%
College Grad	27,000	61%
<b>HH Income</b>		
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\$25k to \$34,999	3,400	8%
\$35k to \$49,999	5,000	11%
\$50k to \$74,999	9,200	21%
\$75k+	21,100	48%
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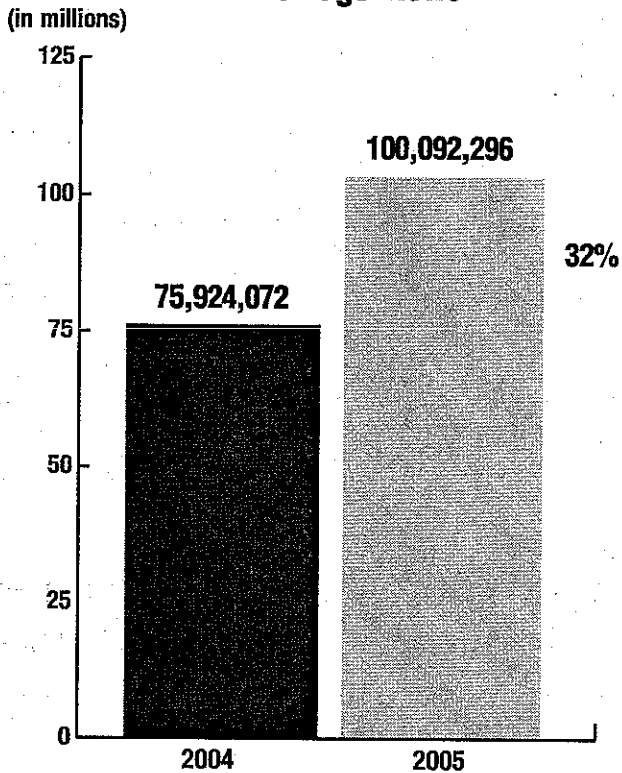
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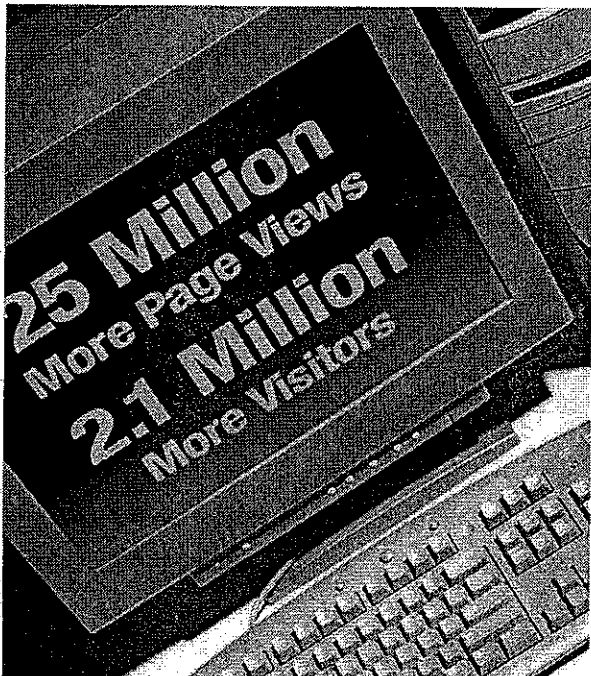
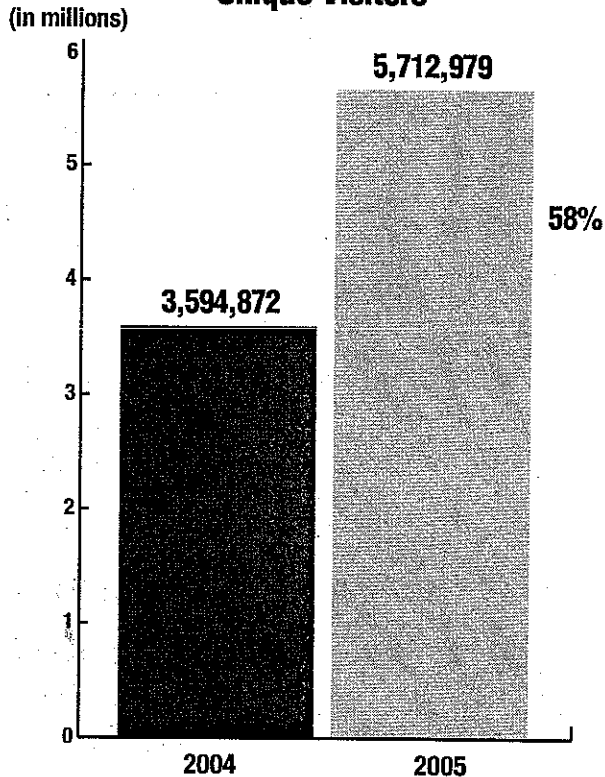
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[News >> State News](#)

## Lawyers in bribery case ask judge for dismissal

[Print Page](#)

Published: Tuesday, February 12, 2008 1:42 PM CST

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — Lawyers for three Mississippi attorneys charged with trying to bribe a state court judge accused federal authorities Monday of relying on "made-up conspiracies" to manufacture a case against their clients.

Richard "Dickie" Scruggs, his son and law partner, Zach, and attorney Sidney Backstrom were charged in November with conspiring to bribe Circuit Judge Henry Lackey for a favorable ruling in a dispute with other lawyers over \$26.5 million in fees.

In court papers filed Monday, defense attorneys asked a federal judge in Oxford to dismiss the charges against the three lawyers, citing the government's "outrageous conduct" in the case.

Defense lawyers claim investigators enlisted Lackey to "instigate the crime" and later concealed evidence that Scruggs and his associates weren't involved in the alleged scheme. To support that argument, defense attorneys cite excerpts from wiretapped conversations between Lackey and attorney Timothy Balducci, who already has pleaded guilty to a conspiracy charge.

Scruggs' lawyers say the taped conversations show that Lackey, acting as a "government agent," solicited a \$40,000 bribe from Balducci "in an unsuccessful attempt to create evidence of a crime."

"This is the crux of the government's outrageous conduct: blatantly manufacturing a crime where there was no evidence of a previously existing crime," defense lawyers wrote.

The tapes also show Balducci repeatedly telling Lackey that Scruggs wasn't involved and wouldn't know about their conversations, according to defense lawyers.

"Yet, after eight months of efforts to find — and then create — evidence of a crime, the government was still left with only made-up conspiracies," Scruggs' lawyers wrote.

U.S. District Judge Neal Biggers Jr. didn't immediately rule on the motion to dismiss the charges. Biggers has set a March 31 trial date for Richard and Zach Scruggs and Backstrom. U.S. Attorney Jim Greenlee did not immediately respond to messages left Monday.

Richard Scruggs is one of the nation's wealthiest plaintiffs lawyers, having earned tens of millions of dollars from tobacco and asbestos litigation.

Lackey was presiding over Scruggs' dispute with other lawyers over \$26.5 million in fees from a mass settlement of Hurricane Katrina insurance lawsuits. Prosecutors claim the attorneys offered to pay Lackey to issue an order sending the case to arbitration.

Defense lawyers said it would make little sense for Balducci to bribe the judge for an arbitration order

because it was a request they were likely to win anyway.

?Moreover, sending the case to arbitration was no guarantee of victory on the merits of the case,? defense lawyers added.

On Sept. 18, investigators were listening when Lackey told Balducci he needed money to ?help get me over a little hump I?ve got,? defense lawyers say. On Sept. 27, Balducci allegedly gave Lackey \$20,000.

?I want you to know, though ... this is just between you and me,? Balducci told Lackey during that Sept. 27 meeting, according to defense lawyers.

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[Opinion >> Columns](#)

## Hood's mea culpa? seems a tad contrived

[Print Page](#)

**By Sid Salter**  
**Political Columnist**

Published: Wednesday, February 13, 2008 12:21 PM CST

JACKSON -- There's no doubt that Attorney General Jim Hood is reading Mississippi's political tea leaves correctly -- but his timing on making that assessment is more than a little suspect.

Hood's right when he suggests that he's catching some heavy flak from Mississippi voters over his past political alliances with wealthy trial lawyers who have recently either been accused of judicial bribery or entered guilty pleas to such charges.

On Monday, Hood said in a press release touting a list of campaign finance reform he's backing: "Despite the recent attacks on my character and innuendo about my honesty in regard to the campaign contributions which I have accepted, I am the only current statewide elected official who has consistently called for meaningful campaign finance reforms."

"Since my election in 2003, I have always sought these changes," said Hood. "Rather than level attacks at me for following the law as it exists presently, my critics would be better advised to join me in pushing for these reforms."

Hood parses the language of his claim -- "the only current statewide elected official" -- to seek campaign finance reform. Hood can make that claim with a straight face, but only by about six weeks.

Former Secretary of State Eric Clark was a longtime champion of campaign finance reform before he stepped down, as has been state Supreme Court Chief Justice Jim Smith and a number of others, but Smith doesn't run statewide.

Give Hood his due. He has paid prior lip service to wanting campaign finance reform. But lacking the ability to provide any leadership toward getting those reforms enacted, Hood went about his merry way engaging in some of the campaign finance practices he said Monday should be remedied.

Hood called for the following campaign finance reforms:

Contributions sent through a political action committee at the candidate's direction should be considered direct donations to the candidate and be reportable as such.

Disclosure of sources giving to "soft money" political advertising by special interest groups.

Candidates should disclose the name of any individual offering loans or extending credit and be required to report how the money was used.

Electronic reporting of donations and expenditures by state candidates that exceeded \$75,000 in a



calendar year.

All of those proposed reforms are sound reforms that should be enacted. Hood has an excellent grasp of some of the most frequent campaign finance abuses.

But as to criticism of Hood's own campaign finances, is he really shocked that the voters would raise their eyebrows?

Hood got \$44,000 in direct campaign contributions from Oxford attorney Richard Scruggs, who is currently facing federal judicial bribery charges in Mississippi. Scruggs also gave \$300,000 to the Democratic Attorneys General Association.

Booneville attorney Joey Langston gave Hood over \$100,000 in direct campaign contributions and \$100,000 to the DAGA.

In 2007, Hood got \$400,000 for his campaign from DAGA in the same year that Langston and Scruggs gave DAGA \$400,000.

As Hood said, he has been 'following the law as it exists presently' and there exists no evidence that any of the Scruggs or Langston contributions were obtained illegally.

But Hood's close political and legal ties to Scruggs and Langston are ties of Hood's own choosing. Attempts to distance himself from Scruggs and Langston at this late date seem at best contrived.

Campaign finance reform should be a nonpartisan issue. But Hood's efforts to change the political subject when he's under significant fire himself aren't the ideal circumstances in which campaign finance reform legislation of this nature can best succeed.

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[Opinion >> Editorials](#)

## Hood not credible as PAC reformer

[Print Page](#)

Published: Wednesday, February 20, 2008 11:50 AM CST

It's humorous when politicians talk about reforming campaign finance after they've been elected taking advantage of the loopholes they want to close.

A few years ago, then-Lt. Gov. Amy Tuck proposed to clarify in law that all loans to candidates are reportable. Her interest in the issue came ironically after it was shown that she was a half-million dollars in hock to wealthy plaintiffs' lawyer Richard Scruggs, a financial connection she hid during her successful 1999 campaign. That reform is yet to be enacted.

Now comes Attorney General Jim Hood, again recommending that political action committees that donate to Mississippi candidates be required to report the actual source of their funds. This proposed reform is intended to stop the way donors try to conceal their involvement in state elections.

The idea is a good one, but Hood is not exactly a credible proponent of it, since he has been one of the beneficiaries of this money dodge. During last year's election, Hood received \$400,000 from the Democratic Attorneys General Association's PAC. Coincidentally, that's precisely the amount that Hood's now embattled trial lawyer buddies -- Scruggs and Joey Langston -- donated to that same PAC.

When Republicans pull this shenanigan of funnelling money to a candidate through an out-of-state PAC - Hood equates it to money-laundering. That's a good comparison, but it's one that applies to both parties.

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[Opinion >> Columns](#)

## It's a little late for Hood to fret about appearances

[Print Page](#)

**By Sid Salter**  
**Political Columnist**

Published: Wednesday, February 20, 2008 11:51 AM CST

JACKSON -- Attorney General Jim Hood has gone to great lengths in recent days to quell what he sees as a barrage of criticism from the media and from bloggers.

Hood has written newspaper columns complaining about "pundits" and "bloggers" generating criticism of his office and suggested that those critics want to "do them harm" -- "them" being "Mississippi's families."

He's granted TV and newspaper interviews in which he dismissed suggestions that he return campaign funds donated by at least three sources who have already entered plea bargains in a federal judicial bribery probe. He suggested that it was unfair for him to be asked to return the donations because Republicans had taken political action committee donations and that: "There's a danger in our politics, when people, corporations are able to buy offices that belong to the people."

That reference came after Hood railed about "big corporations" circumventing Mississippi laws prohibiting campaign contributions over \$1,000 by making legal PAC donations exceeding that amount -- which is true. But in the same breath, Hood draws a distinction between PAC donations from "big corporations" and the \$400,000 in legal campaign contributions he received from the Democratic Attorneys General Association's PAC -- which is the same amount donated to that PAC by Oxford attorney Dickie Scruggs and Booneville attorney Joey Langston.

In November, a federal grand jury indicted Scruggs, his son Zach Scruggs, attorneys Tim Balducci and Sidney Backstrom and former State Auditor Steve Patterson on federal bribery charges involving a lawsuit over \$26 million in legal fees connected to litigation on behalf of Hurricane Katrina victims. Scruggs, his son and Backstrom have pleaded not guilty.

But Balducci and Patterson have pleaded guilty, and Langston has pleaded guilty to bribery charges in a separate case in Jackson. Hood's close ties to Langston and Scruggs have been criticized -- fairly and unfairly -- in connection with the judicial bribery allegations, the Katrina cases pushed by Scruggs against State Farm and the entire concept of outside counsel contracts.

Let's set the record straight. Jim Hood hasn't been accused of a crime by the feds in these cases.

But Hood is drawing fire for not filing state charges against his campaign finance sugar daddies. His defense? Hood says his friendships, legal associations and his acceptance of campaign donations from these figures have created the "appearance of impropriety" and that from a legal standpoint, it would be unethical for him to even try to prosecute the cases.

"The average guy is going to say, 'If he's that close to somebody, he doesn't need to be prosecuting

the case,?? he said. ?It would be like prosecuting relatives.?

From a legal standpoint, lawyers I trust tell me Hood?s telling the God?s truth about that. But selling a legal precept like that to laymen is a tough sell.

That ?average man? Hood talks about sees a public official not prosecuting people who?ve given him large sums of money. There is an ?appearance of impropriety? all right, but the appearance is related to Hood?s failure to prosecute, not his abstention from doing so. That ?appearance of impropriety? ship, in the minds of many it would seem, has long since sailed.

Hood says the local district attorneys in Lafayette and Hinds are the appropriate ones to prosecute this case and that his office will assist if necessary, but that he won?t and can?t.

Thank God Jim Hood didn?t take any campaign cash from Edgar Ray Killen or Frank Melton ? cases in which Hood had no problem pressing state charges.

But admitted felons shouldn?t be able to escape state charges of trying to bribe a judge because they?re friends with or donors to the state?s attorney general.

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[News >> State News](#)

## Judge: Scruggs bribery case can go to trial

[Print Page](#)

Published: Thursday, February 21, 2008 10:53 AM CST

Associated Press

OXFORD ? A federal judge is expected to hear more arguments Thursday in the judicial bribery case against powerful attorney Richard ?Dickie? Scruggs and two others.

U.S. District Judge Neal Biggers Jr. ruled on Wednesday that there is enough evidence against the Scruggs and the others for the case to go to trial. They have pleaded not guilty to counts including wire fraud and defrauding the federal government.

Scruggs, his son Zach and law partner Sidney Backstrom are accused of trying to bribe a judge to get a favorable ruling in a dispute over \$26.5 million in legal fees from a mass settlement of Hurricane Katrina insurance lawsuits.

A trial is set to begin March 31.

Richard Scruggs, who made hundreds of millions of dollars from taking on tobacco, asbestos and insurance companies, could get 75 years in prison if convicted.

Three other defendants have pleaded guilty in the case: attorney Timothy Balducci; Richard Scruggs? former defense attorney Joey Langston; and former state Auditor Steve Patterson, a former business partner of Balducci?s.

Biggers heard testimony Wednesday from Balducci, who prosecutors say approached Circuit Judge Henry Lackey with a ?bribe overture? last year. The judge reported the attempt and worked undercover for the FBI. Balducci allegedly delivered \$40,000 to the judge in three installments between September and November. Richard Scruggs, Zach Scruggs and Backstrom say Balducci acted alone.

On the stand Wednesday, Balducci said Zach Scruggs suggested that Balducci have an off-the-record conversation with Lackey and persuade him to rule in their favor. After that discussion, Balducci said he met with Lackey on March 28.

On Tuesday, federal prosecutors filed with the court transcripts from some wiretaps to support their case.

The transcripts appear to contain conversations secretly recorded by Balducci in which Richard Scruggs and others discuss the wording they want in Lackey?s order in the fee dispute case.

Balducci said it wasn?t until September that Lackey brought up the idea of a payoff.

?We talked about the case,? Balducci said. ?We talked about the fact that he said he was in a position he had gotten himself into. He?d created a hump that he needed to get over and gotten himself into a fix that he needed \$40,000 to get out of. I told him I thought Mr. Scruggs would give him the \$40,000 to rule in his favor.?

He said Scruggs later agreed to the bribe and guaranteed he would reimburse Balducci.

Balducci also testified that Scruggs had tried to use former Sen. Trent Lott ? Scruggs? brother-in-law ? to influence rulings in another dispute. Hinds County Circuit Judge Bobby De-Laughter ?was offered the influence? of Lott ?to put him on a list to be considered? for a federal vacancy, Balducci testified.

Lott?s former chief of staff, Brett Boyles, has said Lott called the judge about a federal court vacancy but that it was among many courtesy calls he made and that he recommended someone else for the job.

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## Hearing gives insight into judge's role in Scruggs case

[Print Page](#)

Published: Saturday, February 23, 2008 10:32 PM CST

Associated Press

OXFORD — For two weeks, Judge Henry Lackey agonized over what to do.

He was pretty sure Tim Balducci had just offered him a bribe and was torn about his next move.

Testimony from Balducci and FBI Special Agent William P. Delaney during a hearing in the federal bribery case against Richard "Dickie" Scruggs and his associates offered the first in-depth look at Lackey's role in building evidence against the famed plaintiffs attorney.

"Judge Lackey was terribly troubled by the whole incident," Delaney said. "He was troubled for two reasons. A, he knew what Mr. Balducci was doing was wrong and at the same time he was conflicted because he didn't want to get his friend in trouble."

Lackey is the key figure in the federal bribery case against Scruggs, his son and law partner Zach, and Sidney Backstrom. All three have pleaded not guilty to charges that include defrauding the federal government and wire fraud.

The judge has not returned multiple messages left by The Associated Press. Testimony last week, however, offered a glimpse of testimony that likely will be offered during a trial, which is set for March 31.

Federal authorities' description of what led to the charges sounds straight forward: Scruggs and his associates paid a judge \$40,000 to rule in their favor in a dispute involving \$26.5 million in Hurricane Katrina settlement fees. But the picture was not so clear to Lackey last March as he considered contacting the U.S. attorney's office in Oxford.

In testimony last Wednesday, Balducci said he first went to Lackey to talk with him about the case involving the Scruggs law firm. He told the judge he thought the case should go to arbitration, something that would likely favor Scruggs.

Lackey felt uncomfortable with the discussion.

"He knew something improper had happened," Delaney said. "He just didn't know if it was illegal or not."

He agreed to help the government find out. He began wearing a wire and recording phone conversations with Balducci from May through September.

Yet even six months after their first conversation, Delaney said Lackey still wasn't sure there had been a crime. So he finally forced the issue and asked the question. Would Scruggs be willing to pay him to rule in his favor in a dispute over \$26.5 million in Hurricane Katrina settlement attorneys fees?

?It took Judge Lackey all summer, from my perspective, to get this thing resolved,? Delaney said. ?And to get this thing resolved, he decided he had to ask that question.?

The answer, according to Balducci, was yes. Balducci has pleaded guilty in the conspiracy and is working with prosecutors to build the case against the three defendants.

Balducci said the idea of going to Lackey was first broached by Zach Scruggs in a meeting at the Scruggses' downtown Oxford office. The Scruggses knew of Balducci's close relationship with the Lafayette County circuit judge and hoped to exploit it.

When asked by defense attorney John Kecker if he had volunteered to approach Lackey, Balducci responded: ?Volunteered? I don't know if I'd put it that way. I was asked to, and I agreed to.?

He recounted the meeting later to federal investigators.

?What I said to the agents is we didn't talk about giving money to Judge Lackey at that meeting,? Balducci said. ?We certainly discussed improperly influencing the judge at that meeting.?

Balducci was startled when Lackey asked for money in a Sept. 18 phone call that was recorded, and went to his office to meet with him three days later to clarify exactly what the judge wanted.

Lackey concocted a story about needing \$40,000 to get himself out of a personal bind and asked Balducci if he thought Scruggs would pay the money, the witness testified.

?I said, yes, that I would help him,? Balducci said. ?I would get it together and help him.?

Balducci contacted Backstrom, a lawyer in the Scruggs firm, to see if the elder Scruggs would pay the judge. Balducci was told to go ahead and pay the money.

He testified that he was willing to front the money, but his business partner, former state Auditor Steve Patterson, wanted word from Scruggs. So Patterson, who has also pleaded guilty in the case, contacted P.L. Blake, another Scruggs associate and a former Leflore County farmer.

?He wanted some direct confirmation because the \$40,000 meant a lot to us at the time and he wanted to make sure that if we were going to do this we would get our money back,? Balducci said.

Word came back from Blake ?that we would be covered and not to worry about it.?

Balducci said he and Patterson finally talked directly with the elder Scruggs about the bribe on Oct. 16.

?Steve and I were there to meet Dick on an unrelated matter, and before we even sat down, he brought it up,? Balducci said.

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# Hood's blessing has become ki death



By Tim Kalich  
Editor

Saturday, February 23, 2008 4:15 PM CST

Jim Hood is a trip.

Last week, Mississippi's attorney general was pouting because the Legisla give him additional wiretapping authority. He said he would need access to surveillance in order to do a better job of rooting out public corruption, suc bribery scandal that has snagged his two largest benefactors.

Hood, a Democrat, blamed the Republicans on the House committee for ki wiretapping proposal. This, however, looked more like a bipartisan rejectic signaled their disagreement by their absence. Ten of the 15 Democrats on didn't show for the vote. Obviously, they weren't too moved by Hood's a


Both parties have reason to be skeptical.

Hood has forfeited any stature he might have in ferreting out corruption w justice system. A couple of days before his wiretapping proposal was rejec his office would not be pursuing a separate state investigation into the cor Scruggs, Joey Langston and other plaintiffs' lawyers implicated in a judicia because of Hood's past close personal and financial ties to them. So far, ti pursued solely by federal authorities.

Hood argues that few would take an investigation under his direction serio what he turned up. That is true. But even though he personally shouldn't

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probe due to obvious conflicts of interest, he could certainly appoint a special prosecutor to investigate the case. Hood is placing the prosecuting responsibility to the district attorneys, knowing full well that that risks making enemies among what have been some of the richest, most powerful people in the state.

Since Hood is saying that his friends, even those who have acknowledged their conflicts of interest, are hands-off when it comes to his office, why should anyone trust him with prosecutive authority? If he's only going to snoop on those who don't give money to his office, that power could be easily abused.

Remember Richard Nixon's enemies list? The bunch surrounding that president misused the power of incumbency, including the power to prosecute, to get revenge on Nixon's political opponents. Nixon was a big fan of wiretapping on the phone conversations of his own advisers and others to try to discover information to the press.

So far, Hood has used his office to reward his trial lawyer friends by steering business their way or by helping them put the squeeze on insurance companies. An office to punish enemies is just the flip side of the coin.

If giving the attorney general broader wiretapping authority is a good idea, why couldn't it be a much worse pitchman for the idea than Hood?

Just as self-defeating is his advocacy of campaign finance reform. Hood does not want the Republicans to launder money by funneling campaign contributions to independent candidates through out-of-state political action committees.

This dodge has been going on for several years, but it's not just the Republicans. Hood himself has been a big beneficiary. In the last election, he collected \$1 million for a national political action committee that funds Democrats running for attorney general. Coincidentally, that's precisely the amount that Scruggs and Langston donated to their PAC.

Hood says he backs a reform, pushed by good government groups, to require disclosure from PACs that contribute to Mississippi candidates. Unfortunately, Hood's reform in these days is like the kiss of death - even sensible ideas get tainted by it.

After the 2007 elections, Hood was the anomaly, the lone Democrat left in office. He's doing his best to help the GOP claim a clean sweep next time around.

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## Scruggs? son wants own trial

Print Page

**By Chris Talbott**  
**Associated Press**

Published: Monday, February 25, 2008 11:17 AM CST

OXFORD ? For most of his life, Zach Scruggs has benefited from his last name.

As a partner in his father Richard "Dickie" Scruggs' law firm, the younger Scruggs is entitled to millions in legal fees and the acclaim of working with one of the nation's most powerful and media savvy plaintiffs lawyers.

Now that he faces trial with his father and an associate on charges of conspiring to bribe a Mississippi judge, however, Zach Scruggs is in the unusual position of having to distance himself from Richard Scruggs.

A federal judge is expected to rule Tuesday on Zach Scruggs' request to have his case severed from his father's, among other key decisions on pending motions.

Despite the formal setting, the Scruggses' feelings showed through in court last week during a two-day motion hearing. They consulted during recesses, leaning in to each other to discuss strategy in quiet tones, and even greeted each other with a special handshake.

Yet in Zach Scruggs' best interests, his attorney argued his case should be separated from his father's because the name that has served him so well in the past now may stand in the way of his defense.

"The whole matter is difficult," Zach Scruggs' attorney, Todd Graves, said in an interview Sunday with The Associated Press. "It's a father-son relationship. He's concerned about his father, but at the same time, though, he's in this case and our contention is he should be tried separately in his own case."

The Scruggses, who declined comment for this story, and fellow defendant Sidney Backstrom have pleaded not guilty to defrauding the federal government and wire fraud, among other charges. Backstrom also is asking U.S. District Judge Neal Biggers Jr. to separate his case from the others.

They are accused in a federal indictment of paying Lafayette County Circuit Court Judge Henry Lackey \$40,000 to rule in their favor in a dispute over \$26.5 million in Hurricane Katrina insurance settlement fees. Lackey is not accused of wrongdoing and worked with federal investigators.

During last week's hearing, Graves told Biggers that he had counted the number of times attorneys, the judge and witnesses had distinguished between the senior Scruggs and his son during the proceedings and came up with only a handful.

He noted that all parties often had to clarify who they were talking about in the hearing and that wrongdoing was often attributed to the "Scruggs law firm" rather than to the individuals.

"That element of confusion could lead to prejudice," Graves argued.

Graves also argued that the cases against father and son should be split because of the "huge disparity" in evidence against the two. He argued evidence against Richard Scruggs seemed more substantial than that gathered against his client.

"Their proof against Zach is so minimal," Graves said. "The proof that they're going to offer against his father would be a lot more than that. And our concern is a jury wouldn't be able to judge him based solely on the minimal proof (prosecutors) indicate they're going to offer at this point."

In one instance, he said the government claims Zach Scruggs took part in a recorded conversation about the alleged Lackey bribe on Nov. 1. Graves told the court, however, he doubted prosecutors could show Zach Scruggs was in the room for much of the conversation. That secretly recorded conversation included references to "sweet potatoes" ? code, authorities say, for the money paid to Lackey.

"He was in the room for a very short period of time where the government alleges code words were being spoken," Graves said Sunday. "But if you're not part of the conspiracy, a code word doesn't mean anything to you."

Tom Dawson, first assistant U.S. attorney for the Northern District of Mississippi, took issue with Graves' description of the case against Zach Scruggs during the hearing. He said there was not only evidence that the younger Scruggs actively participated in the conspiracy, but that he also may have been a part of another bribery scheme.

Biggers also will rule Tuesday on whether to allow testimony about Scruggs' participation in another alleged conspiracy to bribe Hinds County Circuit Court Judge Bobby DeLaughter.

Dawson said the DeLaughter bribery allegations are being investigated by the Public Integrity section at the U.S. Department of Justice. DeLaughter has not been named in any indictment and has denied wrongdoing.

"We have become aware of some evidence that might indicate that Zach Scruggs had some knowledge of the backdoor attempt to influence a judge," Dawson told the court.

Dawson also said Graves was understating Zach Scruggs' involvement in the alleged bribery of Lackey. He noted that federal witness Timothy Balducci, who has pleaded guilty in the conspiracy, testified Zach Scruggs was the lawyer who brought up the idea of Balducci approaching Lackey, his good friend, in an attempt to persuade him to rule in their favor.

And he quoted a transcript of a recording Balducci made of a meeting that allegedly involved the Scruggses.

"Mr. Balducci says, 'Zach, let me bring you up to speed. This is on the Judge Lackey thing,'" Dawson said.

"The statement is made, 'We need to get this exactly right because we are paying for it.'"

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## Lawyer says witness lied to grand jury

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Published: Tuesday, March 4, 2008 1:45 PM CST

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS ? A key government witness lied to the grand jury that indicted several attorneys on charges they conspired to bribe a state judge, one of the accused lawyers claims in court papers filed Monday.

Zach Scruggs, an Oxford, Miss.-based attorney whose well-known father and law partner also faces a bribery charge in the same case, is asking a federal judge to dismiss his indictment due to alleged government misconduct.

Scruggs? lawyers claim grand jurors heard false and misleading testimony from an FBI agent and from former attorney Timothy Balducci, who already has pleaded guilty to conspiring with Scruggs and others to bribe state Circuit Judge Henry Lackey.

Zach Scruggs? indictment is a product of their ?patently false and misleading? testimony, his lawyers argue.

?It has been clear since the filing of this indictment that the government has no credible evidence that (Zach Scruggs) knowingly participated in any scheme to bribe a judge,? the defense lawyers wrote.

U.S. Attorney Jim Greenlee didn?t immediately return a call for comment Monday. Balducci has represented himself in the criminal matter. His office number has been disconnected.

A trial for prominent plaintiffs lawyer Richard ?Dickie? Scruggs; his son, Zach; and fellow Scruggs Law Firm attorney Sidney Backstrom is scheduled to start March 31 in Oxford.

Richard Scruggs, a brother-in-law of former U.S. Sen. Trent Lott, R-Miss., made tens of millions of dollars from tobacco and asbestos litigation. His role in a landmark settlement with tobacco companies was depicted in the 1999 film ?The Insider,? starring Al Pacino and Russell Crowe.

Last week, U.S. District Judge Neal Biggers Jr. rejected a different motion by all three defendants to dismiss the charges based on the government?s ?outrageous conduct.? However, Zach Scruggs? attorneys didn?t see transcripts of grand jury proceedings until last week.

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Tuesday 26 February, 2008

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### Top Stories

## 'Poster child for greed...'

February 26, 2008

Email to a friend  Voice your opinion

We could not agree more with Dickie Scruggs' defense team's declaration that Scruggs has been made "poster-child for greed, attorney malfeasance and tort reform."

Of course the court papers, filed in Oxford earlier this month in an effort to move the case to another venue, stated that such a view of their defendant was unfair and a result of media coverage.

We agree with U.S. District Judge Neal Biggers Jr., decision not to move the case. In our opinion there has not been an abundance of press coverage - in fact we need more coverage of this case.

If the charges are proved true - and some of those involved have already pleaded guilty - this case strikes at the very foundation of the justice system of law upon which everything in this nation is founded.

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## Dickie Scruggs

2/14/2008

### Blogosphere becomes authority, issue in Scruggs case

by John O'Brien

JACKSON, Miss. - In many ways, the saga of indicted trial lawyer Richard "Dickie" Scruggs was made for the Internet, not the time-consuming production of a novel or movie.

"This is history in the making, and not even John Grisham could make this stuff up," said Alan Lange, editor of the Mississippi political site [Y'all Politics](#).

And it's history unfolding at a quick pace, giving bloggers like Lange an edge over newspapers, television stations and talk radio shows. The Scruggs world demands instant updates and unlimited copy as the famed attorney battles allegations he attempted to bribe a state judge.

Y'all Politics was even mentioned in Scruggs' motion for a change of venue.

"The Scruggs case has definitely put our site at another level," Lange said. "We have easily tripled our site traffic in terms of page views since late November when this began.

"The reason for the success of the political blogs in covering this story is that the story is extremely complex. It can't adequately be covered in a few inches of news text or a two-minute TV package.

"The second reason is that it moves so very fast. By the time respected news writers or TV crews lock onto a story and produce it, it's already old news. By design, we have a platform that is custom made for a story that moves this fast."

Blog sites like Lange's, David Rossmiller's Insurance Coverage Law Blog and Folo have been a source for breaking news on:

-[Scruggs' bribery trial](#) (he and two others from his firm have pleaded not guilty to



Scruggs



Rossmiller

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April '07  
March '07  
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December '06  
November '06

offering \$40,000 to Lafayette Circuit Court Judge Henry Lackey for a favorable ruling in a dispute over at least \$26.5 million in Hurricane Katrina attorneys fees, while two of the original co-defendants, attorney Timothy Balducci and former state Auditor Steven Patterson, have pleaded guilty);

-State Farm Insurance Cos. [fight with Mississippi Attorney General Jim Hood](#);

-Booneville attorney Joey Langston's guilty plea in [another alleged judicial bribery scheme](#) involving Scruggs; and

-Scruggs' criminal contempt trial [in Alabama](#).

Each site has something different to offer, Lange said.

"Y'all Politics has very much taken on the role of aggregator," he said. "We try to link to as much first-source data and comment as possible. There are sites such as [Folo](#) or the [Insurance Coverage Blog](#) and Legal Newsline that have more in-depth analysis on specific pieces of the puzzle.

"What we try to do is function as a clearinghouse where someone can come and get all the news, comment on it and put it in some kind of context. We have done that very effectively."

Rossmiller, an attorney at Dunn Carney in Portland, Ore., started his blog for the purpose of opining on court issues involving insurance companies. When Katrina litigation heated up, his focus shifted primarily toward it.

When Scruggs, who partnered with other firms to create the Scruggs Law Firm, was indicted, it was only natural that he follow it -- "Scruggs Nation," he titled his posts.

"The interest is sky-high," said Rossmiller, who noted that his blog's traffic multiplied seven-to-eight times after the indictment.

Rossmiller, a former newspaper reporter in Phoenix, even found himself in the middle of things for a few days.

He had remarked on allegations made by State Farm that Courtney Schloemer, the head of Hood's Insurance Fraud Unit, had consulted with the SKG in an effort to team up on the company.

Schloemer took the time to write Legal Newsline, asking that her message be sent to Rossmiller. Her e-mail can be found [here](#).

The blog world may yet have an impact on the outcome of the case. Scruggs' defense team said the coverage has potentially influenced the jury pool and wants the case moved to a federal court outside of Mississippi.

Scruggs made his fortune in litigation against asbestos companies and by representing several states in their case against tobacco companies. His work helped lead to 1998's Tobacco Master Settlement Agreement, which has an estimated worth of \$246 billion to the 52 participating states and territories.

"The print media blitz has been supplemented by Mississippi-based web logs



(blogs) that report, in excruciating detail, every event in the prosecution and defense of the Scruggs criminal case, the criminal contempt case against Scruggs in Alabama, the recently dismissed State Farm case against Attorney General Hood and the various cases in which State Farm has sought Scruggs's testimony," wrote Scruggs' attorney, John Kecker of San Francisco.

"The stories at times border on the ridiculous. Articles and blog postings have detailed the Scruggs family's annual Christmas party; the flight of Scruggs's private plane to Dallas for a maintenance visit; and the efforts of Joey Langston to sell his ski house at Telluride."

To Lange, it's all proof that his site is having its intended effect -- dispersing as much information as possible.

"It's very obvious to me that lawyers on both sides of the Scruggs criminal case are watching," Lange said. "Obviously, the blog coverage has been mentioned in various court pleadings. However, we are also seeing little signs such as some court filings being scanned instead of electronically converted so that those PDF files are not text-searchable.

"They are now keenly aware of what happens to their work product once it gets in the public domain."

And the public demands even the most intimate details of the case.

"There's an old saying that Mississippi is a club, not a state," Lange said.

"Mississippi is so small that just about everyone in the state has had some personal interaction with at least one of the players in this tragedy, so it's compelling on an individual level.

"It also involves a fall from grace of people who were well-known and larger than life. Dickie Scruggs, Jim Hood, Joey Langston, (former Attorney General) Mike Moore and Steve Patterson are all household names in Mississippi and all are intimately involved in this story."

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## Comments on this article

### Very good comments on blogs

We also appreciate all of the hard work and information. The claims adjusting community has a hard time obtaining information as carriers do not discuss this with staff folks (at the local claim management or adjuster level) much less independent adjusters. Both groups have been named in many of the Scruggs cases. Seeing the documents posted on Blogs such as yours, Rossmiller's, Folo, and Ya'll Politics is making us much more aware of the details. We can also examine the

documents from our claim handling perspective. These are issues facing the adjusting community each and every time they meet with an insured or public adjuster who brings up these cases. It is much easier dealing with it when we can see the big picture by reading the pros and cons of each case through the eyes of attorneys commenting on their blogs versus carrier "talking points" just prior to a media press release. We APPRECIATE you!

- Debbie (2/15/2008 2:04:56 PM)

**blogs**

great great information.as a state farm agent.i have read many of your blogs and also ya ll politics. it is very interested to see what lawyers are saying about the case. i was particularly happy that one lawyer from the coast stood up for state farm and said he was please with his claim on the coast. i guess he had flood coverage.. i am satisfied after all this we paid many millions of dollars we didn t owe..fat chace we will ever get that back or even ask for it back.at the end of the day we will all learn from this horrible experience..thank you for your hard hard work when you were tired to write your views on the tough legal situation..

- harris gholson 11 (2/15/2008 11:36:35 AM)

**yall politics**

You notice how Lange includes Jim Hood, Mississippi Attorney General as those who have taken "a fall from grace." Yall Politics has been after Hood for over a year and they are still steaming because he won re-election. They would rather MS take a fall from grace over State Farm who had to re-evaluate 5000 claims due to the efforts of our Attorney General. Hood is not involved in the Scruggs scandal. The site is biased towards republicans, hence the "Politics" in the name. They censor and quell dissent.

- bellesouth (2/15/2008 10:37:00 AM)

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## Who's in da house - UPDATED

March 1st, 2008 - by lotus · [7 Comments](#)

### UPDATED BELOW

I was just checking in with something called Google Analytics to see (since the in-house sitemeter knows only that, so far, www.folo.us has had over 222,000 visits) who-from-where has visited here since *either* we moved over from folo.wordpress.com on February 10 *or* we hooked up with Google on the 13th — I'm not sure which it means.

Anyhow, pretty interesting stats:

1. Yep, most foloers check in from the U.S., but the other most-interested countries are, in order,

Canada  
Norway  
Belize  
Germany  
Australia  
United Kingdom

Kuwait  
Hungary  
(and 9 from somewhere Google knows only as “not set” — is that you, Elvis?)

2. Within the U.S., Mississippians account for approximately two-thirds of us hanging out here. I'll tell you the next nine states in order eventually, but first I'm interested in what y'all would guess about that. (Hint: #2 wasn't my only surprise.)

3. As we know, ours is a pretty “sticky” table: the average visitor spends 9:18 minutes here per visit, taking in 4.14 pages at a time. Since either February 10 or February 13, 17% of us have wandered in and sat down for the first time, and 43% of us have returned between nine and 50 times — but 456 people have it *rill* bad, coming back from 101 to 200 times apiece.

Now tell me, after Mississippi, what's your guesstimate of the next nine most-Scruggsed-up state populations?

**UPDATE:** Very good guesses, you four, and everybody got close — but (you may be relieved to hear) no cigar. I hope this doesn't hurt any feelings, but believe it or not, those folks next-door in Alabam' don't even crack the Top 10. (I dunno, either they're so transfixed by their own muck, they got no time for Mississippi's; or they're running low on confusers over there; or they're all down at Florabama raisin' hell and tossin' mullet 24/7.)

Anyhow, here's the list of the most-folo-following states, in order through yesterday. To'dja to expect surprises:

1. Mississippi
2. New York — *Noo Yawk?* Well, um, *Hey*, youse goise!
3. Illinois — Hallooo there, State Farm!
4. Tennessee
5. Louisiana
6. Georgia
7. Florida
8. District of Columbia — Greetin's to our loyal FBI agents!
9. Texas
10. California — Yoohoo, Keker VanNest (and all you screenwriters)!

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**7 responses so far ↓**

- [1 duckweedpond](#) // Mar 1, 2008 at 9:59 am  
AL, LA,FL, TN,TX,CA, D.C./Virginia, NY, NC?
- [2 Magnolia](#) // Mar 1, 2008 at 10:23 am  
LA,TX,AL,D.C.,CA,NY,GA,FL,CA,TN.
- [3 op99](#) // Mar 1, 2008 at 11:16 am  
CA TX NY FL IL OH MA NJ DC
- [4 MSlawyer](#) // Mar 1, 2008 at 4:02 pm

Illinois, Oregon, New York, Washington DC, Alabama, Louisiana, Tennessee, Maryland, Virginia

- [5 Delta Boy](#) // Mar 1, 2008 at 8:11 pm

Since I usually check in via Hughes, I wonder in what state I show up?

- [6 Shelby](#) // Mar 2, 2008 at 7:38 am

This Alabamian folos you almost every day.. keep up the good work.

Countdown to the Scruggs trial .. at 28 days and counting.

- [7 lotus](#) // Mar 2, 2008 at 7:56 am

Woohoo, glad to have you with us, Shelby!

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Swinging and went out Schwinging” On the other I agree with Mags...not much...

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- o [Sailor](#) on **Eliot Spitzer resigns:** NMC, Ok, nationwide Obama getting more independents maybe I should clarify that they're soft DEMOCRATIC supporters, as too many polls have reported Obama...
- o [Virginia](#) on **Noxubee DA moves to dismiss Levon Brooks' case:** How come the prosecutors shouldn't be prosecuted? Allgood has been using taxpayer money to make Hayne and West very wealthy...
- o [kingfish](#) on **Eliot Spitzer resigns:** First of all, much of this occurred while he was AG. He should be disqualified from office because that left him open to extortion and blackmail while in office....
- o [lotus](#) on **Adm. Fallon resigns - UPDATED:** Try not to hyperventilate, kingfish. Ya might stroke-out on us, and that wouldn't be good a-tall.
- o [Jane](#) on **The Innocence Project's new case: Steven Hayne:** Let's face it, Hayne is no doubt still doing his 1000 autopies a year. He'll be testifying in criminal cases for years.
- o [kingfish](#) on **Adm. Fallon resigns - UPDATED:** scare? Um, yeah. Hezbollah killed 271 Marines. remember that? Hezbollah is controlled and funded by Iran. Iran has given Al Qaida training and support in...

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