

Ex-Congressman Jesse Jackson Jr. Sentenced to 30 Months in Prison

Former Illinois congressman Jesse Jackson Jr., once one of the most promising black politicians in the United States, was sentenced on Wednesday to 2-1/2 years in prison for misuse of campaign funds.

Jackson, a former Democratic representative and the son of civil rights leader the Rev. Jesse Jackson Sr., apologized before U.S. District Judge Amy Berman Jackson sentenced him on Wednesday.

Jackson, 48, had pleaded guilty in February to misusing about \$750,000 in campaign funds on luxuries such as fur capes, celebrity memorabilia, mounted elk heads and a Rolex watch.

"I misled the American people," Jackson said at the hearing. "I also want to apologize to my dad and my mother," Jackson said, wiping away tears. "I take responsibility for my actions and I'm very sorry for what I have done," he said.

His wife, Sandi, a former Chicago city council member, was sentenced to one year for falsifying tax returns that failed to report the campaign money as income.

The couple have two children. Prosecutors have recommended the sentences be served at different times to reduce the impact.

"I stand before you today asking for mercy," Sandi Jackson said, adding that "my heart breaks every day with the pain it has caused my babies."

The younger Jackson asked on Monday that the judge recommend to the Bureau of Prisons that he serve his time at a federal prison in Montgomery, Ala., because it would allow him to be

nearer to his wife and children. The judge said Wednesday she would make that recommendation.

Jackson Jr. served in Congress from 1995 until he resigned after re-election last year, citing health reasons.

He disappeared from public view in the summer of 2012 and speculation swirled for weeks about his condition. At first Jackson Jr. said he was being treated for exhaustion, and his doctor said in July 2012 said he was being treated for a "mood disorder."

He eventually was treated for at least six weeks at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn., for bipolar disorder.

Jackson Jr. also was sentenced to three years supervised release and ordered to perform 500 hours of community service. Sandi Jackson was given 12 months supervised release and 200 hours of community service.

U.S. prosecutors asked in June that two of the Jacksons' houses, in Washington and Chicago, be subject to forfeiture, along with a bank account holding \$80,000, as part of a \$750,000 judgment.

Prosecutors asked in a filing this month that the forfeiture motion be delayed until Oct. 25 since Jackson has said he is trying to pay off the judgment.

Dozens of letters to the judge were filed in the court docket before the sentencing. They included ones from Jackson Sr., ordinary people who had met the congressman only once, and Democratic Representative Marica Fudge, the head of the Congressional Black Caucus, asking for clemency.

Most letter writers expressed outrage at the couple's behavior and asked for the maximum punishment as a way to combat persistent corruption in Illinois and in Chicago's Cook County.

“Cook County is likely the most corrupt county in the most corrupt state and the self-serving greed displayed by Mr. Jackson over several years in office qualifies him for the Illinois Hall of Shame,” Cook County resident Kenneth Kunka wrote.

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