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Lawmakers must realize they can go to prison

TRENTON

If you want to know why New Jersey politics continues to stink, just look at the case of John Lynch -- former Democratic political boss, state senator and mentor to former Gov. James E. McGreevey -- who has been reduced to the ranks of common criminal.

U.S. Attorney Chris Christie nailed Lynch for mail fraud and income tax evasion and Lynch was sentenced to three years and three months in the feds' Gray Bar Hotel. Judge Stanley R. Chesler also fined Lynch \$50,000 to "send a message to public officials."

Great guy?

Lynch's lawyer, John Arseneault, gave the judge 172 letters talking about what a great guy Lynch is. Some of them came from legislators. One gets the impression Lynch and his supporters aren't sorry he used his influence for money, just that he was caught doing it.

One can only wonder what must be going through the minds of lawmakers under investigation now that they realize there is a very real possibility they can go to prison, too. Wait until the next ones are indicted and have to step down. Fellow lawmakers will heap praise as if the crooks are the best things that ever happened to this state. And their criminal activity will be but a momentary lack of judgment in a sea of monumental great deeds.

And how about that bill that was to strip lawmakers of their pensions if they get caught breaking the law while being "public servants"? Delayed. Are they going to wait until all of their pals are sentenced to pass it so they won't lose their pensions?

Hauling assets

A Garden State Parkway maintenance crew used state equipment and state time to remove truckloads of dirt for a private developer in Berkeley Township. A months-long investigation by the State Police followed. The result: No criminal wrongdoing.

Let's get this straight. Public workers being paid by public money hauled private dirt on state time and, while inappropriate, it was not criminal? Isn't taking state money for work you did for someone else using state equipment a criminal act? Maybe not in New Jersey.

Attorney General Stu Rabner's office wasn't involved in the probe, said his spokesman. Then maybe his office needs to take a second look at it.

Partly personal

All of us at the Gannett State Bureau in Trenton wish you happy holidays and the very best for 2007. We appreciate the many letters and e-mails we get throughout the year. This column will return to your paper Jan. 14, but the daily blog will continue and is available 24/7. I'll rejoin my "Jersey Guys" sidekicks, Craig Carton and Ray Rossi, on 101.5 FM radio on Jan. 12. Until then, enjoy life but be safe.

Who?

Senate Republicans put out a press release saying state Sen. Robert Littell, R-Franklin, Sussex County, wants to name a road after President Woodrow Wilson, a Democrat, which could lead to one being named for "President Regan."

There was a president named Ronald Reagan, a Republican. But the only Regan we know is Judith, who headed the book outfit that published the trashy McGreevey tome. Why would Littell want to honor her, especially since her boss, media mogul Rupert Murdoch, just canned her?

Murdoch, who owns Fox TV and the book publishing company, was said to be unhappy with some of Regan's choices to unleash upon the public.

McGreevey's book this week was 15,186 on Amazon.com's best-seller list.

Move reversed

The University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey was going to hire two high profile lawyers to review accusations Christie's special monitor made against interim president Bruce Vladeck. Under pressure, the school backed off.

UMDNJ doesn't get it. Even as it is a national laughingstock, board chairman Robert Del Tufo, who was attorney general under Gov. Jim Florio, made it worse. He wanted to hire recently retired state Supreme Court Chief Justice Deborah Poritz and former state Criminal Justice Director Edwin Stier to second guess Christie.

Poritz, whose court ignored the state Constitution and earned the reputation of a three-ring circus, also was a do-nothing attorney general. That this idiot scheme was even considered means Del Tufo needs to move on.

The writer is Trenton bureau chief for Gannett New Jersey newspapers. His column appears every Monday. He can be reached via e-mail at bobingle@app.com and heard on New Jersey 101.5 FM radio at 5 p.m. Fridays.

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