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Recordings reveal earlier bribery scheme

Lafayette ADA implicates former DA Harson in trial

BY CLAIRE TAYLOR
Staff writer

A Lafayette assistant district attorney on trial in connection with a kickback scheme, in a conversation recorded during the investigation, implicated former District Attorney Mike Harson in a bribery scheme in his office over 10 years ago.

Gary Haynes, an assistant district attorney in the 15th Judicial District Attorney's Office, is on trial in U.S. District Court in Lafayette on six charges including conspiracy to commit bribery, bribery, using a cellphone in aid of bribery (two counts), conspiracy to commit money laundering and obstruction of justice.

The charges are in connection with kickback schemes that included the district attorney's pre-trial intervention program where he was hired by District Attorney Don Landry in January 2022. The two have known one another for years and Haynes helped Landry with his campaign.

When the FBI raided the district attorney's pretrial intervention offices in May of 2022, Landry put Haynes on leave without pay. Haynes' attorney, Todd Clemons, at the start of the trial last week, wanted prosecutors to expand clips of audio recordings taken during the FBI investigation of the case. The defense submitted transcripts of the recordings into the record. While the recordings were not all played for the jury, they include interesting statements by Haynes.



Haynes

A Feb. 3, 2022, meeting between Haynes and co-conspirator Leonard Franques took place at Jason's Deli on Johnston Street. Unbeknownst to Haynes, Franques had already cut a deal with federal prosecutors after they raided his home and office on Dec. 8, 2021. The meeting was recorded, with FBI agents listening at a nearby table and from across the street. In that recording, Haynes advises Franques on how to avoid getting caught, bringing up a 2012

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Back to work on Buc-ee's



STAFF PHOTO BY BRAD KEMP

Dirt work has resumed on the site of the Buc-ee's store planned for Lafayette. Crews have returned to the site this month for foundation work that had been completed or near completion until heavy rains washed some of that away. When the store will start construction is a bit of a mystery at this point. Originally scheduled to open in the second quarter of next year, the store is now expected to open in 2028, according to the company's website. Buc-ee's officials have not commented on the delay. The company will spend \$82 million on the project, with \$12.5 million of that for public infrastructure.

La. doctor picked for vaccine panel

Griffin has questioned need for inoculations for children

BY MARK BALLARD
Staff writer

WASHINGTON — U.S. Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. has appointed a Baton Rouge physician to the committee that recommends vaccination policies to the federal government — and she has repeatedly questioned COVID-19 vaccines and other inoculations for children.



Griffin

"I am very, very skeptical," Dr. Evelyn Griffin said in 2024 while speaking to the congregation of the Rev. Tony Spell's Life Tabernacle Church near Central City. "For a lot of us, the COVID experience has really opened our eyes. You know that I have a lot of concerns. One of those concerns, I would say, is about the COVID vaccine." Spell became a face of resistance to then-Gov. John Bel Edwards' pandemic restrictions, defying orders to stop holding services and successfully winning a court challenge against Edwards. Griffin told the congregation concerns about the COVID vaccine

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Murrill calls on former House speaker to return historic artifact that's missing

BY TYLER BRIDGES
Staff writer

Find it and give it back. That was Attorney General Liz Murrill's message Tuesday for former House Speaker Clay Schexnayder regarding an ancient cypress board that was displayed at the State Capitol for decades but disappeared last year after being in Schexnayder's district legislative office in Gonzales. "I will confer with the Lieutenant Governor's Office and will take any action that may be appropriate under the circumstances," Murrill said in reply to a request for help

from Julius Mullins, a retired Baton Rouge doctor whose grandfather Walter Stebbins donated the board to the state in the 1950s. "Schexnayder knew he had it, he knew that it was in his office and he was responsible as the custodian of state property," Murrill added. "I think he's responsible for it regardless of how it came to be present in his district office. He needs to return it." As was reported last week, the board was last seen 18 months ago in Schexnayder's district office. Schexnayder said he doesn't know of its current whereabouts. The leasing manager for his of-

fice says his team never removed it. The board's disappearance has frustrated Stebbins' grandchildren, with Mullins acting as the family's lead sleuth to find it. "Would it be possible for you to help my family find this valuable piece of history which has gone missing and return it to the Capitol?" Mullins asked in separate emails to Murrill and the current House speaker, Phillip DeVillier, R-Eunice. Devillier didn't respond to either Mullins or a request for comment

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STAFF PHOTO BY JAVIER GALLEGOS

Julius Mullins, whose grandfather donated the missing board decades ago, points to where he remembers the board used to hang at the State Capitol. Mullins said the last time he saw it there was 2003 or 2004.

