

The Birmingham News

McNair gets 5 years in sewer bribe case

Restitution set at \$851,927 for ex-county commissioner

By ERIC VELASCO and VAL WALTON
News staff writers

Former Jefferson County Commissioner Chris McNair was sentenced to five years in federal prison Wednesday. He also was ordered to pay restitution for \$851,927 in bribes he received from contractors currying favor with the man in charge of the county's \$3 billion sewer rebuilding program.

McNair, 81, was convicted in 2006 of charges that stemmed from several sewer contractors paying for work to expand his photography studio. He also pleaded guilty in February to accepting \$140,000 in cash from an engineering firm, then trying to cover it up by billing the company for photography work.

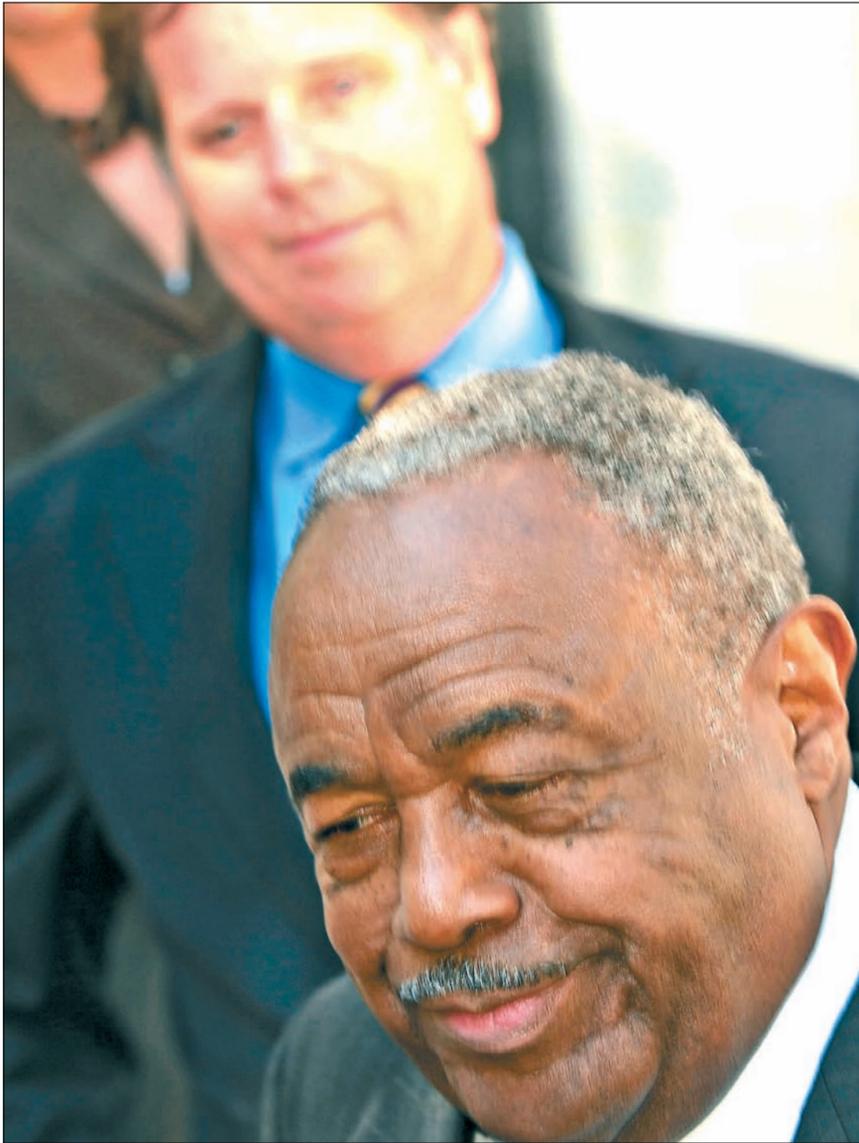
McNair, who served on the county commission from 1986 until he retired in 2001, told U.S. District Judge Lynwood Smith he could not explain why he took the bribes.

"I made a mistake," he said. "I apologize to the court, to my wife and family and to the thousands of people who live here in Jefferson County."

McNair, father of one of the four girls killed in the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church bombing in 1963, is a key figure in the federal prosecutions of 21 county sewer officials, contractors and officials of those companies. Most were convicted of bribery and conspiracy that occurred from 1996 to 2003.

The judge allowed McNair to remain free as he appeals his conviction.

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NEWS STAFF/JERRY AYRES

Former Jefferson County Commissioner Chris McNair leaves federal court Wednesday after being sentenced in a corruption case. Behind him is his lawyer Doug Jones, a former U.S. attorney who prosecuted two murder cases in the 1963 church bombing that killed McNair's daughter.

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TIMELINE

Events and circumstances surrounding the Jeffco sewer controversy from the beginning

CONVICTIONS

The individuals and companies that have been convicted, with breakdown of sentences and fines

Bid to extend troop leave fails

Senate blocks effort to counter Bush plan

By SHAILAGH MURRAY and JONATHAN WEISMAN
The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — Senate Republicans Wednesday rejected a bipartisan proposal to lengthen the home leaves of U.S. troops fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan, derailing a

measure that war opponents viewed as one of the best chances to force President Bush to accelerate a redeployment of forces.

The proposal, sponsored by Sens. James Webb, D-Va., and Chuck Hagel, R-Neb., failed on a 56-44 vote, with 60 votes needed for passage — a tally that was virtually identical to a vote in July. Republican Sens. Richard Shelby and Jeff Sessions of Alabama voted against the measure.

A last-minute campaign by the Defense Department and the White House to kill the

measure won over Sen. John Warner, R-Va., an influential voice on defense policy who had voted with Webb and Hagel in July.

Warner's defection deflated any momentum that had been building and effectively ensured the legislation's demise. Just six Republicans supported the proposal, one fewer than the previous count.

The vote offered the most vivid evidence yet that the Bush administration still

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Simpson released on bail



O.J. Simpson, center, is flanked by his lawyers, Yale Galanter, right, and Gabriel Grasso, during Simpson's arraignment in Las Vegas. Simpson was released after a judge set his bail at \$125,000. See story, Page 2A.

THE RACE FOR BIRMINGHAM MAYOR

Cooper decided to do something about city

CANDIDATE PROFILES

► This is the fourth in a series of profiles of the people running for mayor of Birmingham. Profiles will run daily Monday through Friday. You can see an archive of these and other stories on the mayor's race at blog.al.com/birmingham-elections.



Patrick Cooper
"We've got to create a public school system that's as good as some of the private schools."

By JOSEPH D. BRYANT
News staff writer

Ask Patrick Cooper any question about his family, his finances — even his ex-wife — and he'll give an unfazed answer ending with a smile.

As a lawyer, Cooper is used to asking questions, and in his run for mayor of Birmingham, his first try at elected office, he's gotten used to being on the other side of inquiries.

Around his downtown campaign headquarters, the candidate is casual in his "Cooper for Mayor" T-shirt, wind pants and flip-flops as his black Lab puppy sits at his feet. Cooper has made seeking the mayor's seat a full-time job and put his law practice on hold.

"I made a conscious decision to come to my home state in 1994 — specifically Birmingham," said the Mobile native. "Having watched the death spiral that the city has been in the last eight to 10 years, it really breaks my heart. At some point you ought to do something or shut up, so I decided to do something."

What Cooper, 48, has done in little more than a year is grow from a political unknown into a serious contender in the race for mayor. By late last month, he had raised the most campaign money among the 10 candidates, including five sitting elected officials.

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Hicks lending name to BJCC club scene
MONEY | Section D

Water Works cuts back on restrictions

By STAN DIEL
News staff writer

The Birmingham Water Works on Wednesday lowered its drought alert to Stage 2 and announced an end to some restrictions, saying recent rains and an expected seasonal decline in demand make water supplies sufficient.

The utility ended surcharges for excess use — the final surcharges on bills will be for water used last Saturday — and lifted the ban on the use of sprinklers for watering lawns. Nursery and landscaping busi-

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- Georgia lake flow cutback concerns officials / 3B

nesses, which had chafed under restrictions, were freed to water as they see fit.

"It's a shot in the arm for our whole industry," said an elated James Harwell, executive director of the Alabama Nursery and

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Davis' political aide also paid by two-year college

Board members on record as criticizing payroll arrangement

By BRETT J. BLACKLEDGE and MARY ORNDORFF
News staff writers

A political appointee paid more than \$76,000 a year by an Alabama two-year college to work for U.S. Rep. Artur Davis also received \$12,000 in 2005 from Davis' campaign, records

show. Gina Bailey McKell received \$1,000 a month from Davis' campaign as a fundraiser in 2005, the same year she received \$76,883 from Alabama Southern Community College in Monroeville to work for Davis, system and campaign finance records show.

State school board members and Chancellor Bradley Byrne have criticized McKell's arrangement to work for Davis

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WEATHER
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