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Dixie county attorney's federal criminal trial now set for November

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JACKSONVILLE – Despite the limits caused by the global COVID-19 pandemic, civil and criminal trials in county, state and federal courts continue.

A Dixie County attorney who was indicted for his alleged activity in violation of federal law, as a private attorney, and another attorney who is one of the former state attorneys for the Third Judicial Circuit of Florida are seeing their cases evolve after their indictments on federal criminal charges were filed in February, according to records.

About six months after United States Attorney Maria Chapa Lopez announced on Feb. 26 the unsealing of an indictment charging Jeffrey Siegmeister, then 52, of Live Oak and Marion Michael O'Steen, then 41, of Old Town with conspiracy to use a facility of commerce for unlawful activity, conspiracy to commit extortion, and aiding and abetting extortion, O'Steen is tentatively scheduled for jury trial in November, according to information gathered through PACER.

The Public Access to Court Electronic Records (PACER) service provides electronic access to federal court records. PACER provides instantaneous access to more than one billion documents filed at all federal courts. There is a fee for the service and journalists are not excluded from paying.

The honorable United States District Court Judge Marcia Morales Howard, who is based in Jacksonville, issued an order granting a motion to continue the trial when that motion was heard in August, according to records.

In her most recent rulings, Judge Howard set the status conference for O'Steen's trial for Oct. 18 at 3 p.m. in Jacksonville Courtroom 10-B of the United States District Court to be before her - Judge Howard, according to records.

The jury trial currently is scheduled for the trial term commencing on Nov. 1 at in Jacksonville Courtroom 10-B before Judge Howard, according to records.

Motions from prosecutors Assistant United States Attorney Kelly Karase and Assistant United States Attorney Mai Tran are due Sept. 27, according to records. That order was signed by Judge Howard on Aug. 12. AUSA Karase is the lead prosecutor in this case, according to records.

The motion to continue the trials of both O'Steen and Siegmeister, were granted, according to records.

As noted, Siegmeister is a former state attorney for the Third Judicial Circuit of Florida, which is an elected position as the chief prosecutor for this judicial circuit in state court.

O'Steen is not only a private attorney, but he is also the attorney for the Dixie County Board of County Commissioners as well as the Dixie County School Board.

In the original 12-count indictment handed down in February, Siegmeister was additionally charged with conspiracy to commit federal program bribery, wire fraud and filing false tax returns, according to records.

O'Steen was additionally charged with failure to file a form in connection with the receipt of currency, according to records.

The most recent records show O'Steen charged with the federal crimes of conspiracy to defraud the United States and interference with commerce by threat or violence, according to records.

The crimes alleged by the government against O'Steen are level 4, according to records. This

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is the fourth in the ranked list of federal felonies. It is a serious crime, though not as serious as those in the three categories above it.

O'Steen remains free on \$100,000 bail, according to records.

United States Attorney Maria Chapa Lopez announced on Feb. 26 the unsealing of an indictment charging Siegmeister, then 52, of Live Oak and O'Steen, then 41, of Old Town with conspiracy to use a facility of commerce for unlawful activity, conspiracy to commit extortion, and aiding and abetting extortion.

In the original 12-count indictment, Siegmeister is additionally charged with conspiracy to commit federal program bribery, federal program bribery, wire fraud and filing false tax returns.

O'Steen was additionally charged with failure to file a form in connection with the receipt of currency, according to records.

Siegmeister was arrested in Arizona on Feb. 26 and made his initial appearance in federal court (Flagstaff, Arizona) on Monday, March 1. O'Steen appeared in federal court in Jacksonville on Feb. 26 and pleaded not guilty. He was released on a \$100,000 bond.

According to the indictment, Siegmeister was the elected State Attorney for the Third Judicial Circuit of Florida from 2013 through 2019. O'Steen was a defense attorney who represented clients being prosecuted by Siegmeister's office during that time, according to records.

As part of the alleged conspiracy to use a facility of commerce for unlawful activity, between approximately November 2017 and May 16, 2019, O'Steen is reported to have requested official acts from Siegmeister --including the favorable disposition of charges filed against his clients, and the delay of official actions in order to enable O'Steen to obtain additional "fees" from at least one of his clients -- for which Siegmeister is accused of having solicited bribes from O'Steen, according to the charging documents.

Regarding the extortion charges, the federal government alleges that O'Steen solicited Siegmeister to resolve a case against one of his clients through pre-trial intervention (PTI). O'Steen demanded \$60,000 from that client in order to procure the PTI agreement from the Third Judicial Circuit State Attorney's Office, according to the initial allegation in the indictment handed down by the federal government.

O'Steen and Siegmeister then are accused of having coordinated to withhold the finalization of the PTI agreement until the client paid \$60,000 in cash to O'Steen. In connection with this case, Siegmeister solicited O'Steen to purchase a bull from a herd of livestock he owned for \$4,000, and to make a political contribution, according to the information in the original indictment.

Additionally, O'Steen is charged with failing to file within 15 days the required Form 8300 with the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network to acknowledge his receipt of more than \$10,000 in cash from the client, according to the information in the original indictment.

Siegmeister is separately charged with conspiracy to commit federal program bribery and federal program bribery in connection with another prosecution by the State Attorney's Office for the Third Judicial Circuit. According to the indictment, Ernest Maloney Page IV, was a defense attorney representing a client charged with two driving under the influence ("DUI") offenses.

There was a time when Page served in the State Attorney's Office of the Third Judicial Circuit. The Third Judicial Circuit includes Columbia, Dixie, Hamilton, Lafayette, Madison, Suwannee and Taylor counties. There are 20 judicial circuits in Florida.

In regard to Page's client's family, they owned a tractor dealership. In or around September of 2017, State Attorney Siegmeister informed attorney Page that he would favorably resolve one of the client's DUI charges in exchange for a \$10,000 discount on a tractor that Siegmeister

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wanted to buy from the client's dealership, and favorably resolve both DUI charges in exchange for a \$20,000 discount, according to information provided by the federal government in its original indictment of Siegmeister.

Ultimately, Siegmeister and his wife at the time purchased a tractor and accessories from the client's dealership, the price of which Page's client discounted by approximately \$20,000. In exchange, Siegmeister dismissed the DUI charges and Page's client pleaded guilty to charges of reckless driving with alcohol and refusal to submit to a blood alcohol test, according to the charging document.

On Aug. 20, 2020, Page pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to commit federal program bribery for his role in facilitating this transaction. As part of the plea-negotiated agreement with the federal government, Page agreed to cooperate fully and testify against others if needed, according to reports.

Siegmeister also is charged with wire fraud in connection with his legal guardianship of an elderly individual who lived in Columbia County. According to the indictment, from approximately January 2010 through April 2016, Siegmeister engaged in a scheme to defraud his ward and his ward's estate by, among other things, transferring the victim's assets for his own benefit, filing materially false documents with the court to conceal those transfers, and by creating a last will and testament for the victim, which designated Siegmeister's relative as the sole beneficiary of the victim's estate.

Siegmeister is also charged with filing false tax returns for tax years 2015, 2016 and 2017, according to the original charging documents by the federal government.

An indictment is merely a formal charge that a defendant has committed one or more violations of federal criminal law, and every defendant is presumed innocent unless, and until, proven guilty.

This case was investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Internal Revenue Service-Criminal Investigation.

As noted, this trial now is scheduled to be prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Kelly S. Karase as the lead prosecutor and Assistant United States Attorney Mai Tran.

The defense attorneys listed in records on O'Steen's case are Mitchell A. Stone, and T. Bradley McRae.

Siegmeister's initial attorney that was listed is Bobi Frank, a Gainesville criminal defense attorney. Waffa Hanania of the Federal Public Defender's Office is the current lead attorney representing Siegmeister now, according to records accessed via PACER.

As noted, an indictment is merely a formal charge that a defendant has committed one or more violations of federal criminal law. Every defendant is presumed innocent unless, and until, proven guilty.