

SOUTH JERSEY

1st court appearance today for Bryant

STORYCHAT:

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TRENTON

State Sen. Wayne Bryant, D-Lawnside, scheduled to appear in court today to hear the federal government's charges against him, faces a U.S. attorney with a perfect record in corruption cases.

Attorney Edwin Jacobs of Atlantic City said the charges against Bryant -- given Christopher Christie's record -- "are more than a little daunting. They're terrifying."

To beat the rap, Bryant faces a "long, uphill battle," Jacobs said.

"Sometimes the best thing to do for a client is to negotiate a deal that cuts his losses," said Jacobs, who is not representing Bryant.

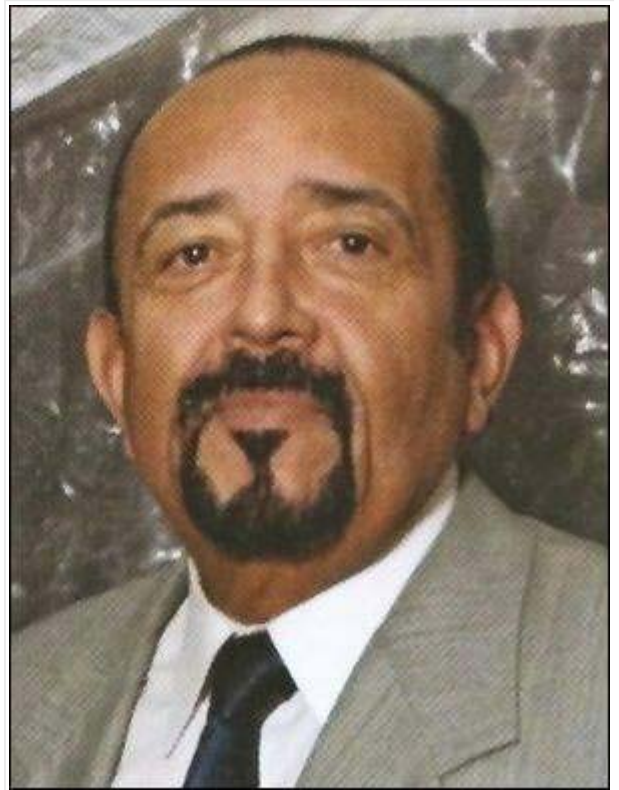
Since taking office in 2002, U.S. Attorney Christopher Christie has filed charges against 201 people and has never lost a case, according to his spokesman, Michael Drew-niak. Of the 201 people charged, fewer than half a dozen cases went to trial, Drew-niak said. The rest either pleaded guilty or were found guilty.

Bryant is expected to return from a vacation in Mexico this morning to hear charges that he defrauded the state's pension system by getting paid for three no-show jobs, Drewniak said.

Also scheduled to appear at 10 a.m. in Trenton before U.S. Magistrate Judge John J. Hughes is R. Michael Gallagher, former dean of the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey in Stratford.

Gallagher is charged with setting up a phony job for Bryant. Federal prosecutors say Gallagher also distorted records so that he would improperly qualify for bonuses from the university.

Bail will be set for both men this morning, Drew-niak



said. Neither is scheduled to enter a plea to the 20-count indictment released Thursday. Carl Poplar, attorney for Bryant, did not return calls. Jeremy Frey, attorney for Gallagher, declined comment.

But Richard Sparaco, a criminal defense lawyer in Cherry Hill, said he expects Bryant to come out fighting.

"When you get up to Bryant's level, you can expect some fireworks," said Sparaco, who represented a drug dealer in the corruption trial of former Camden Mayor Milton Milan. Milan fought charges that he accepted bribes and laundered money from the mob. He was found guilty in December 2000 and was recently released from prison.

Until last year, Bryant, a 27-year politician from Lawnside, was one of the state's most powerful legislators. As chairman of the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee, he helped steer millions to UMDNJ, according to the indictment. Bryant recently announced he would not seek re-election to the Senate.

Rocco Cipparone Jr., a defense attorney representing former Camden City Councilman Ali Sloan EI, said Bryant and Gallagher can receive lesser sentences if they cooperate with authorities. As the charges currently stand, Cipparone said, Bryant could face at least 10 years in federal prison.

Cipparone said Sloan EI -- a longtime political opponent of Bryant's -- could receive between 24 and 30 months in federal prison when he is sentenced on April 19 for accepting \$36,000 in bribes. Cipparone said he will ask the court to impose a lighter sentence.