

SCANDALS LINGER AS PHILLY READIES FOR CONVENTION

STATE'S POLITICAL IMAGE TARNISHED BY CORRUPTION

PHILADELPHIA: The streets are freshly swept, the hotel rooms are pristine, the party invitations have gone out and extra police patrols are assigned. Philadelphia is ready for the Democratic National Convention. Tougher to clean up and shine, however, is the state's political image, tarnished by recent political corruption cases that have implicated many Democrats across the state. In June, a longtime Philadelphia congressman, Chaka Fattah, was convicted of laundering federal grants and non-profit funds to repay an illegal \$1 million campaign loan and help family and friends.

Last year, former state Treasurer Rob McCord left office and pleaded guilty to attempted extortion in a campaign fundraising scandal. Attorney General Kathleen Kane is awaiting trial on charges that she unlawfully leaked secret grand jury material to a newspaper and then lied about it under oath. And those are just the high profile cases. The former sheriff of Philadelphia has been charged with conspiracy; traffic judges have been convicted of ticket-fixing; state lawmakers have admitted taking bribes.

Jeff Jubelirer, a communications consultant who has worked on Republican campaigns, said these cases send a message about this overwhelmingly Democratic city, which could provide grist for presidential nominee Donald Trump and his fellow Republicans as the general election draws near. "From a messaging standpoint, it lines up well for the Trump forces to say crooked Hillary and crooked Philadelphia," Jubelirer said. "I think we will absolutely see that as we head into the fall." Democrats can't afford a diminished turnout in Philadelphia.

Highly competitive

Pennsylvania is shaping up as highly competitive in the race between Trump and presumptive Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton, who will need a sizable vote in greater Philadelphia to put her over the top. After the convention concludes, Clinton is planning a rally on Independence Mall, seeking to excite voters as she shifts to the general election. Former Gov Ed Rendell, D-Pa, said he wasn't worried about the scandals. "We had corruption in 2012 and Barack Obama carried the city by 468,000 votes," Rendell said. He said some of this was what you get in "big city politics," adding that the one-party dominance in Philadelphia can

breed corruption. Philadelphia is no stranger to political malfeasance. It's where congressmen and other elected officials were caught taking illicit cash payments in the Abscam sting operation in the 1970s. During that investigation, then-Rep. Michael "Ozzie" Myers was caught on tape, saying: "Money talks in this business and bull—walks."

A state where the Constitution and Declaration of Independence were produced is now so rife with political scandal that it scored an F grade in the 2015 State Integrity Investigation. Over the past decade, former state Sen. Vince Fumo, a Democrat, went to prison for defrauding the state Senate, a South Philadelphia nonprofit and a seaport museum of millions of dollars. Former City Councilman Rick Mariano got prison time for taking bribes. Jubelirer said that it may seem like political infractions are on the rise, but that's only because "everyone's a journalist. All the coverage and the videos and the bloggers." Still, he added, "when you have someone as high up as Chaka Fattah, that levels a boom." To be sure,

the city is cracking down.

Michael Nutter made city government ethics a priority when he was mayor, installing a "chief integrity officer" in an office near to his. Mayor Jim Kenney has continued the practice. "We try to and insist on the most ethical and transparent government we can do," Kenney said, expressing confidence that these issues will not overshadow the convention. "Democracy was started here," Kenney said. "The first fire department, library, the first woman president is going to be nominated and elected from Philadelphia."

At the end of the day, David Thornburgh, president of the nonpartisan good government group Committee of Seventy, said there was simply a certain amount of acceptance of corruption in Philadelphia.

"It's not like we were moving along at one level and all at once there was a huge spike (in corruption)," Thornburgh said. "Partly because of the one party dominance there's a tolerance. Somebody called it the Philly shrug. 'Eh, it's Philly.'" — AP



CLEVELAND: Sen Ted Cruz, R-Texas, addresses the delegates during the third day session of the Republican National Convention. — AP

TRUMP'S CRUZ CRITICISM RENEWS QUESTIONS ABOUT TEMPERAMENT

CLEVELAND: Donald Trump followed the script in his big speech to the Republican National Convention. Less than 12 hours later, he was free-form again, Trump being Trump, resurrecting a conspiracy theory linking the father of his chief rival from the primaries to John F Kennedy's assassination. Trump's plunge into a lengthy litigation of past spats with Ted Cruz - even bringing up his retweet of an unflattering photo of Cruz's wife, Heidi - did nothing to assuage Republican fears about their standard bearer after a national convention complicated by unforced errors.

The episode raised questions, too, about how he might govern inside the White House, having so far led a scattershot campaign marked by a short temper and a seemingly improvised approach to policy-making. Presidential candidates typically come out of their conventions looking ahead to the general election and intent on expanding their appeal beyond the partisans who showed up. Trump took a bizarre look backward at what was billed as a post-convention thank you reception Friday for supporters and staff at his Cleveland hotel.

Ugly chapters

Reviewing one of the ugliest chapters of the nomination contest, Trump mentioned Cruz's father, saying "All I did was point out the fact that on the cover of the National Enquirer there was a picture of him and crazy Lee Harvey Oswald having breakfast." There is no evidence linking Rafael Cruz to JFK's murder. Republicans lustily cheered their nominee on the convention's closing night but not all can figure out what he'd be like in the Oval Office.

"It remains a mystery how exactly he will govern other than through platitudes and statements like, 'The violence will end,'" said Ari Fleischer, White House press secretary under President George W Bush. Former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, a Trump supporter who was on the short list for running mate, said: "Trump tends to take, very personally, attacks and he tends to counterattack very aggressively. That's a fact. And it doesn't seem to be changeable." He went on: "He would govern with great intensity. He would push the margins on many things." Gingrich said Trump would make mistakes, "Yes. But he would do something."

Earlier in the week, Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell, who supported Trump at the convention, told The New York Times that Trump made a "rookie mistake" when he questioned a core commitment to NATO allies. Trump's NATO comments sent shockwaves across Europe and the diplomatic world, only a taste of what the response would be if Trump had been

musings from the Oval Office. Convention misfires began before the gathering itself. Former NFL quarterback Tim Tebow was billed on the convention speaking program released by the campaign last week, but described his appearance as a rumor and didn't come.

Cruz missile

On the convention's opening night, most delegates left after Melania Trump's address, and Iowa Sen. Joni Ernst, a rising Republican star, spoke to an overwhelmingly empty convention hall. Mrs Trump's speech was well-received - for a few hours. But striking similarities were uncovered between portions of her speech and the one delivered by Michelle Obama at the 2008 Democratic convention. The fallout dragged on as campaign chairman Paul Manafort repeatedly insisted there was no plagiarism. Finally on Wednesday, the campaign released a statement blaming a writer for unknowingly lifting passages from the speech.

Then came the Cruz missile. Trump's team allowed him to take the prime-time stage, despite knowing he would not explicitly endorse Trump. The Texas senator's speech sparked a torrent of boos. It was another setback for a convention that aimed to unify the party. Trump repeatedly stepped on his own messaging, for example phoning in to Fox News just as the mother of an American killed during the attack in Benghazi, Libya, was speaking powerfully onstage. His lengthy interview with The New York Times on foreign policy robbed attention from running mate Mike Pence hours before his keynote address.

Manafort rejected the idea that the campaign's message had been muddled. "The speeches have all been well-received," he said Friday. "And that's the bottom line: People are hearing the message. He predicted a bump in the polls next week. Fleischer said that by conventional standards, he'd grade the convention a C-plus or B-minus, but this isn't a conventional campaign. The political class "will judge those things and call it poorly done, and for good reason," he said. "But most of the voters just focus on what Trump says and what he represents."

Henry Barbour, a Republican national committeeman from Mississippi, was willing to forgive the Trump's campaign mistakes. "Every convention, every campaign has mistakes, and that's OK," he said. "It's July. There is ample time for folks who need time to understand why Donald Trump is a better pick than Hillary Clinton. He's not George Washington, not Abraham Lincoln, but he's a heck of a lot better than Hillary Clinton." — AP

JAILED VENEZUELAN OPPN LEADER APPEALS SENTENCE

CARACAS: Jailed Venezuelan opposition leader Leopoldo Lopez appealed his 14-year sentence during a marathon hearing that stretched into early yesterday, declaring himself innocent of inciting violence at anti-government protests in 2014. Following the hearing, which lasted 12 hours, the court has 10 days to decide whether to accept the appeal.

Lopez, who calls himself a political prisoner, transferred to the court in Caracas from a military prison on the outskirts of the capital. "I am innocent of the crimes for which I am accused," Lopez said. "I assume full responsibility for having convened the peaceful protest, under the terms established by the constitution, as is my right and the right of all Venezuelans to do," he said. Dozens of supporters rallied outside the courthouse holding pictures of Lopez with the messages "Free Leopoldo Now" and "Wanting a better Venezuela is not a crime."

Lopez's family and an opposition lawyer confirmed his presence at the hearing. He was apparently ushered into court out of view of journalists waiting outside. A 45-year-old US-educated economist, Lopez was arrested in February 2014 amid a wave of pro- and anti-government

protests that swept Venezuela and left 43 people dead. The government accused Lopez, one of leftist President Nicolas Maduro's most headline opponents, of inciting the violence.

He denies the charge, calling his arrest an act of political repression. His sentence, handed down in September after a closed-door trial, was strongly condemned by the United Nations, the United States and the European Union.

Lopez's mother and lawyers were allowed into Friday's hearing, but not the two Spanish advisers helping prepare his defense. One of the advisers, former Spanish justice minister Alberto Ruiz-Gallardon, called the court's handling of Lopez's case "arbitrary" and "unjust."

His defense lawyers say Venezuela's court system is beholden to Maduro's government. The head of the Organization of American States, Luis Almagro, wrote on Twitter that "the OAS is closely watching" the appeal, saying judicial impartiality was "key." Lopez's wife, Lilian Tintori, said her husband had been held in solitary confinement for weeks and that the documents for his appeal were removed from his cell. "Despite that, they don't know him," she said. "He won't break." — AFP

EX-KKK LEADER TRIES POLITICAL COMEBACK

BATON ROUGE: A quarter century after his credible run for governor of Louisiana rattled the national political establishment, white supremacist David Duke has jumped into the crowded competition for a US Senate seat in his home state, receiving rebuke from Republicans who don't want him running on a ballot as a member of their party. Duke - once an avowed Nazi sympathizer who headed a Ku Klux Klan group - fell back into relative obscurity after losing a 1991 runoff to scandal-scattered Democrat Edwin Edwards.

A follow-up presidential run from Duke went nowhere, and 10 years later, he pleaded guilty to bilking supporters in 2002 and spent a year in federal prison, although he later declared he did nothing wrong. He had occasional run-ins with authorities in Europe, such as the time he was detained by Czech authorities in 2009 on suspicion of denying the Holocaust.

On Friday, however, he declared "the climate of this country has moved in my direction," as he registered to run on the Nov 8 ballot as a Republican for the Senate seat being vacated by David Vitter. Duke said he was partially spurred by the recent shooting deaths of three law enforcement officers by a black man. "I believe my time has come," he said after submitting his paperwork. He added: "The people of this country, the patriotic, decent, God-fearing people of this country are now right with me."

Duke said he's espoused principles for years that are similar to the themes Republicans are now supporting in Donald Trump's campaign, on issues such as immigration and trade. He said Americans are "embracing the core issues I have fought for my entire life." Earlier, his announcement had appeared on his website, nudging down links to pages

decrying "Zionist terror" and the "Jewish Supremacist Role in anti-European Movements."

'White unity group'

Duke, 66, was associated with neo-Nazi groups as a student at LSU. He was grand wizard of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1970s and headed a "white unity group" - the National Association for the Advancement of White People - in the 1980s. He is registered with the GOP, but Republicans at the state and federal level quickly denounced his Senate bid. Roger Villere, chairman of the Republican Party of Louisiana, said in a statement the party "will play an active role in opposing" him, calling Duke a "hate-filled fraud who does not embody the values of the Republican Party." Ward Baker, with the National Republican Senatorial Committee, said Duke will not have the support of his organization "under any circumstance."

The launch of Duke's campaign comes as Louisiana grapples with deep racial tensions after the shooting death of a black man by white police officers and the killing of three law enforcement officers. Duke said he was "shattered" by the slayings of police. In a lengthy speech, Duke talked of the "massive racial discrimination going on right now against European Americans," and what he called a biased media working against him. He called the Black Lives Matter movement a "terrorist organization" and said he wanted equal rights for everyone.

"You don't come together by a narrative in the controlled media that white people are evil and black people are faultless. You come together on the idea that every people in this country have a right to respect, every people have a right to fairness," he said. — AP



BATON ROUGE: Former Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke shakes hands with qualifying officer Joe R Salter, right, after registering his candidacy for the November 8 ballot as a Republican at the Louisiana Secretary of State's office. — AP



PHILADELPHIA: In this June 21, 2016, file photo, Rep Chaka Fattah, center, leaves the federal courthouse. — AP

TRUMP PACS LEAVE WITH FAT WALLETS

CLEVELAND: After a slow start, big money is flowing toward efforts to help Donald Trump. Super PAC side meetings during the Republican National Convention have yielded millions of dollars in financial commitments, their leaders said, although some of the wealthiest and best-known donors remain uncomfortable with a presidential nominee whom they call divisive and light on policies.

A group called Rebuilding America Now landed a \$3 million donation on Monday and made a pitch to about 25 donors Wednesday at a Ritz Carlton gathering that featured Trump campaign officials, said Laurance Gay, the group's director. With the fresh infusion of cash, the group is set to air anti-Hillary Clinton and pro-Trump television advertisements next week during the Democratic National Convention. "Donors left our event feeling much less confused about the super PAC situation," Gay said. "If there's a time to begin giving, it's now."

Another super PAC, Great America PAC, has been working in Cleveland to woo donors, including multimillionaire investor Foster Friess and oil and gas billionaire Harold Hamm. Trump advocates Ben Carson and Dorothy Woods, a widow of one of the four Americans killed in the Benghazi, Libya, attacks, spoke to about 100 people who attended a Great America PAC meeting on Monday, said the group's co-founder, Eric Beach.

Both groups need new money: They're facing pro-Clinton efforts with more than \$130 million. And FEC filings in recent days showed Great America PAC began the month with less than \$1 million in available cash, and Rebuilding America Now with just over \$500,000. Donors have been slow to engage with pro-Trump super PACs partly because the candidate spent months criticizing such groups as "corrupt" and ridiculing those who give money to politicians as puppet masters. Others aren't sure yet where he stands on policies they care about.

Major donors

One holdout is the DeVos family, major Republican donors in Michigan who founded Amway. Betsy DeVos, in Cleveland as a delegate, said that while her family wouldn't "preclude" helping Trump, they're concerned they haven't heard more from him on issues such as school choice. They're also not happy with his tone and language. "A lot of the things he has said are very off-putting and concerning," DeVos said. Another complication has been the pileup of potential groups to help Trump - with at least six super PACs in the mix. The uncertainty has left some, including oil billionaire T. Boone Pickens and gaming mogul Sheldon Adelson, holding off.

"He's not giving to any of them right now," said Andy Abboud, Adelson's political adviser, who posted on Twitter a photograph of Trump with Sheldon and Miriam Adelson Wednesday night at the convention arena. Abboud said seemingly all of the groups have made a pitch to Adelson. That includes Rebuilding America Now. Gay said he and Trump friend Tom Barrack, who helped land the group's seed money, met with the Adelsons in early June in Los Angeles. Rebuilding America Now's biggest donor so far has been Los Angeles developer Geoffrey Palmer, who gave \$2 million. But on Monday a \$3 million donation from Home Depot co-founder Bernie Marcus arrived, according to two sources familiar with the donation who requested anonymity because they weren't allowed to discuss it. Marcus' spokesman could not be reached for comment.

Gay is a longtime friend of Paul Manafort, Trump's campaign chairman, and said he and Barrack started the super PAC at Manafort's behest. And Trump's campaign has made it clear to donors that they like what Rebuilding America Now is doing; Manafort called into the group's Wednesday meeting, and new vice presidential candidate Mike Pence has circulated a statement praising it. Federal rules prohibit Trump and his campaign from coordinating the pro-Trump spending done by super PACs. New money is enabling Rebuilding America Now to air ads next week nationally and in key states such as Ohio and Florida. — AP