



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on March 27, 2014

Anti-gun California State Senator Charged With Gun Trafficking

In a move that surprised nearly everyone who knows him, California State Senator Leland Yee [was arrested](#) by the FBI on March 26 on felony charges ranging from gun trafficking to soliciting illegal campaign contributions in exchange for political favors.



At about the time Yee was released on a \$500,000 bond, California State Senate President Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg called for him to resign or else be suspended. Steinberg also removed Yee from all his committee positions.

A remarkably successful politician for years, Yee suffered only one loss — his unsuccessful bid for mayor of San Francisco in 2011, leaving him \$70,000 in debt. When he decided to run for secretary of state in November, following the end of his term as state senator, Yee was under financial pressure.

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The 137-page [FBI affidavit](#) against Yee spells out in excruciatingly painful detail how the FBI, in its years-long attempt to bring down gang kingpin Raymond “Shrimp Boy” Chow, had infiltrated Chow’s organization and discovered the link between Yee and his longtime friend and campaign finance manager Keith Jackson. Jackson and Yee served together on the San Francisco Board of Education together, and Jackson even served as school board president for a time. Jackson needed funds to support Yee’s campaign, and Chow’s organization looked to be the perfect place to obtain them.

So, in trying to bring down the big fish, the FBI got lucky and brought down an even bigger one.

Yee’s success as a politician was legendary. From 2006 to the present, he presented 181 bills and saw 138 of them signed into law. He served, up until March 26, on 10 different senate committees and chaired three others. He was opposed to violent video games such as Grand Theft Auto, holding that they were training grounds to inoculate youngsters against violence, and he was also notoriously anti-gun. At one point, while promoting the closing of a so-called loophole in California’s already onerous assault weapons ban, he said:

It is extremely important that individuals in the state of California do not own assault weapons. I mean, that is just so crystal clear, there is no debate, no discussion.

In 2006 Yee was named to the Gun Violence Prevention Honor Roll at the Brady Campaign for his efforts to promote micro-stamping on handguns and ammunition. And just last week Yee received an award from the Society for Professional Journalists for his work fostering government transparency.

Yee knew his way around guns, and he had connections to some Muslim groups that would be interested in importing fully-automatic M-16s into the United States. So when an individual associated with Chow offered to help him erase some of his campaign debt by making the introduction, Yee jumped



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at the chance, not knowing of course that he was in fact dealing with an FBI informant who had infiltrated Chow's organization. Yee picked up \$10,000 for the introduction.

That was only one of the seven felonies with which the FBI is charging Yee. The affidavit reads like something out of a John Grisham novel. Here's just a small sample from pages 23 and 25:

During the time frame from at least May 2011 through the present, Keith Jackson has been involved in raising campaign funds for Senator Yee. This includes raising funds for Senator Yee's campaign during Senator Yee's run in the San Francisco mayoral election on November 8, 2011; to retire Senator Yee's debt from [that] mayoral campaign; and for Senator Yee's current campaign in the California Secretary of State election to be held in November 2014....

In connection with efforts to retire the mayoral campaign debt, Senator Yee and Keith Jackson agreed that Senator Yee would make a telephone call to a manager with the California Department of Public Health in support of a contract under consideration with [the FBI agent's] purported client, and would provide an official letter in support of the client, in exchange for a \$10,000 campaign donation. Senator Yee made the call on October 18, 2012, and provided the letter.... On November 19, 2012, Keith Jackson accepted the \$10,000 cash donation from [the agent] who was paying Keith Jackson and Senator Yee the money on behalf of [another FBI agent].

In connection with the gun trafficking charge, the affidavit was equally clear about Yee's role:

In a further attempt of Keith Jackson and Senator Yee to gain more money from [the FBI agent], Keith Jackson told [the agent] that Senator Yee had a contact who deals in arms trafficking. This purported arms dealer was later identified.

Jackson requested that [the FBI agent] provide a campaign donation on behalf of Senator Yee, for Senator Yee to facilitate meeting with the arms dealer with the intent of [the FBI agent] to purportedly purchase a large number of weapons to be imported through the Port of Newark, New Jersey.

During a meeting with [the agent], Senator Yee and Keith Jackson, Senator Yee discussed certain details of the specific types of weapons [the agent] was interested in buying and importing.

When asked about whether Yee would plead innocent, his lawyer, Paul DeMeester, said Yee would do so. But DeMeester also said he hadn't had time to digest the details contained in the affidavit to know whether that decision was final.

Yee is the third California Democrat senator to find himself in serious trouble just since the first of the year. State Senator Roderick Wright was convicted in January of voter fraud and perjury, while State Senator Ron Calderone was forced to take a leave of absence following his indictment on charges of bribery and money laundering linked to a federal sting operation. Said Senate President Pro Tem Steinberg:

I am angry. I'm angry on behalf of the people and I'm angry on behalf of the 37 [remaining] members [of the senate] whose hard work every day on behalf of the people is being tarnished....

Then he spoke directly to Yee: "Leave! Don't burden your colleagues and this great institution with your troubles. Leave!"

At this moment in time it's fair to conclude that Yee's career is over. Instead of taking over as California's secretary of state in the fall, he'll be contemplating his future from behind bars: Each felony comes with a 20-year jail sentence. For Jackson, the future is even bleaker: He's been charged in the



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same affidavit for his involvement in a murder-for-hire scheme. As for Chow, the big fish the FBI was initially after, his long record of criminal activities will also likely give him plenty of jail time to contemplate his future.

For Derek Cressman, one of Yee's opponents in the race for secretary of state, this is a gift from heaven: "We are clearly beyond the point of looking at [just] one bad apple and instead [we are] looking at a corrupt institution in the California senate," he pointed out.

If Cressman is elected as the new secretary of state, it'll be interesting to see if he can do anything about that.

Photo of Leland Yee: AP Images

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