



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on September 5, 2014

Former Virginia Governor and Wife Guilty of Fraud, Conspiracy

Claiming through their attorneys that their marriage was so dysfunctional that any conspiracy charges simply wouldn't hold water, former Virginia Governor Bob McDonnell (shown) and his wife [were nevertheless convicted](#) of 11 out of 14 charges of fraud and conspiracy in federal court on Thursday. Sentencing is scheduled for early January 2015, and will likely result in years if not decades behind bars for the couple.



Former Virginia Commonwealth University professor Bob Holsworth, who followed the case from its inception, expressed surprise at the defense attorneys' odd strategy:

When we look at the defensive strategy, it was one that suggested [that] if the McDonnells publicly humiliated themselves in some fashion by talking about how their marriage was dysfunctional, by talking about how their children didn't communicate with their father about \$10,000 wedding gifts, that somehow the jury would believe that....

What happened is that the jury rejected the essence of the defense's arguments.

One of the charges never considered by the jury was bad judgment exercised by the former governor, as the case could have been nipped in the bud in early 2012 and then settled last summer through a plea bargain for a single felony. Todd Schneider, a former executive mansion chef, was fired in 2012 for allegedly stealing food from the mansion kitchen. He countered by saying that he was told to take the food as payment, under the table, for catering some of the couple's events. Schneider exposed the McDonnells' relationship with the CEO of Star Scientific, Johnny R. Williams.

In June 2013, the *Washington Post* picked up on the matter and confirmed a pattern of self-dealing, conspiracy, and fraud that led to a grand jury indictment on 14 counts of fraud and conspiracy in January of 2014. This followed the former governor's rejection of a plea bargain offered to him whereby he would declare himself guilty of just one felony count of lying on a loan document. As a self-proclaimed born-again Christian, McDonnell obviously was not familiar with the Old Testament proverb "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." (Proverbs 16:18, KJV) Great is the fall of a politician who was previously held in high regard not only by his party and his friends but also by the people who elected him. When he left office as governor of Virginia just weeks before his and his wife's indictments in January, his approval rating was 55 percent favorable to 32 percent unfavorable among registered voters in the state.

His *curriculum vitae* is impressive. McDonnell served on the executive committee of the Republican Governors Association and briefly as its chairman. He served in the Virginia House of Delegates for 14 years from 1992 to 2006, and was the state's attorney general from 2006 to 2009, after which he ran successfully for governor, taking office in January 2010. One reason his favorability rating was so high, perhaps, is because Virginia's unemployment rate declined during his administration from 7.4 percent



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in January 2010 to 5.2 percent in December 2013, when the national employment rate fell from 9.8 percent to 6.7 percent during the same time.

Following a five-week trial, the jury took only three days to convict the couple on all but three felony charges. The corruption charges included using a jet aircraft owned by Johnny Williams during McDonnell's campaign for governor of Virginia. From the original list of indictments, one finds this:

On or about October 3, 2010, Johnny Williams (JW) agreed to let Robert McDonnell use JW's aircraft to fly from Richmond, Virginia, to Sacramento, California, for a political event.... JW used the trip as an opportunity to discuss Star Scientific's products directly with Robert McDonnell.... JW told Robert McDonnell that Star Scientific needed the assistance of the Virginia state government, and Robert McDonnell told JW that he would put JW in contact with the Virginia Secretary Of Health and Human Resources.

It got worse:

In or about April, 2011, through in or about March, 2013, the defendants [Robert and his wife Maureen McDonnell] participated in a scheme to use Robert McDonnell's official position as the Governor of Virginia to enrich the defendants and their family members by soliciting and obtaining payments, loans, gifts and other things of value from JW and Star Scientific in exchange for Robert McDonnell ... performing official actions on an as-needed basis, as opportunities arose, to legitimize [and] promote ... Star Scientific's products....

The defendants took steps throughout that time to conceal the scheme.

The total value of cash, loans, and other assistance granted in this *quid pro quo* conspiracy was estimated at more than \$165,000. The death knell for the defense consisted of two e-mails, sent just six minutes apart, in which McDonnell wrote to Williams asking about the documents that would have finalized a \$50,000 loan from him, and then sending an e-mail to one of his staff members to "see me about [Star Scientific's] Anatabloc issues" at Virginia Commonwealth University and the University of Virginia. At the trial, McDonnell testified that he was "astounded" to learn that his wife had in fact been the one to arrange the \$50,000 loan from Williams. He further indicted himself when he claimed to have "no idea" that Williams had taken his wife on a \$20,000 shopping spree in New York.

As he and his wife were leaving the courthouse on Thursday, he thanked the members of the press who had been following the lurid trial from the beginning for "the way you handled this." And then, just before getting into his car he quietly added, "All I can say is that my trust remains in the Lord." He must have been referring to another Old Testament proverb which says, "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths." (Proverbs 3:5-6, KJV)

In January, unless a planned appeal surprisingly negates the convictions, McDonnell and his wife will see their paths directed to a federal penitentiary where they will have plenty of time to reflect on their failings and shortcomings and perhaps to become better acquainted with both the Old and the New Testaments.

A graduate of Cornell University and a former investment advisor, Bob is a regular contributor to The New American magazine and blogs frequently at www.LightFromTheRight.com, primarily on economics and politics. He can be reached at badelman@thenewamerican.com.

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