

Former Ohio House Speaker Larry Householder convicted in \$60 million bribery scheme along with former

Written by Kathy
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By Kathy Wray Coleman, associate publisher, editor in chief.

CINCINNATI, Ohio – Former Ohio House of Representatives speaker Larry Householder and lobbyist and former state Republican Party chairman Matt Borges were convicted on Thursday by a Cincinnati jury of their peers in what prosecutors say is a \$60 million bribery scheme involving House Bill 6, two nuclear power plants, and greedy right wing politicians and GOP businessmen, a bribery scheme orchestrated to pass a \$1.3 billion bailout of the two nuclear power plants.

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The federal jury found the pair guilty of conspiracy to participate in a racketeering enterprise involving bribery and money laundering in Ohio's largest ever corruption case. The verdict came after about 9-1/2 half hours of deliberations over the course of two days. The trial began on Jan 23, though indictments were issued some two and a half years ago. And while Householder, 63, took the stand to testify in his own defense, Borges did not, after prosecutors made a fool of Householder during cross examination.

Householder and Borges, 50, both face up to 20 years in prison and both have said that they plan to appeal. Neither showed any emotion when the jury verdict was read. Several other co-defendants await trial.

While Borges' attorney has not commented publicly on the stinging verdict, Householder's attorney was eager to comment and said that he and his client are currently reviewing his options.

"We are incredibly disappointed in the verdict," Householder's attorney Steven Bradley said in a statement on Thursday.

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Prosecutors were elated with the outcome of the case.

"Through its verdict today, the jury reaffirmed that the illegal acts committed by both men will not be tolerated and that they should be held accountable," said Kenneth Parker, the U.S. District attorney for the Southern District of Ohio who helped to prosecute the celebrated case.

An FBI agent testified in the case and broke it wide open saying that Householder pocketed \$500,000 from the bribery scheme, if not more. Special Agent Blane Wetzel also told the jury three weeks into the trial that Borges purportedly got \$366,000 and Jeff Longstreth, a former Householder advisor, and Juan Cespede, two of Householder's co-defendants, allegedly stole some \$3.2 million between them.

FirstEnergy Corp. of Akron and two of its Ohio nuclear power plants are at the core of the case, which has gained national attention and has touched nearly every major Republican political player in Ohio, including Gov Mike DeWine, Secretary of State Frank LaRose and state attorney general David Yost. They have not been charged in the ongoing legal saga and have been mum since Thursday's verdict came down

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Described in a damning complaint filed in federal district court by the U.S. district attorney's office, Householder and FirstEnergy Corp, and a host of others, stood or stand accused of scheming to steal taxpayer monies under the guise of a nuclear power plant bailout in one of the worst bribery schemes in Ohio history. At the center of the controversy is Householder's relationship with FirstEnergy Corp officials and a \$1.3 billion financial rescue legislation dubbed HB 6 , a state law adopted in 2019 that added an additional fee to every electricity bill in the state That state electricity surcharge was to generate some \$150 million annually in payments for seven years to subsidize FirstEnergy's two failing Ohio nuclear plants (Perry and Davis-Besse) and was mired in public corruption, prosecutors say. State lawmakers repealed part of HB6 last March with support from the governor.

Householder stood accused of using some \$100,000 in bribery money, part of \$500,000 in illegal monies the FBI confiscated from his personal accounts, for costs on his home in Florida. His co-conspirators got hundreds of thousands of dollars too, if not millions. And FirstEnergy officials were obliged to fund the bribery scheme, according to the complaint.

David DeVillers, the former U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Ohio and Parker's predecessor, called the case one of the worst misuses of Ohio tax-payer money in American history, and public corruption and money laundering of mass proportions. More than a dozen others, practically all of them Republican operatives, have also been arrested and charged in connection with the now infamous bailout fiasco.

FirstEnergy helped finance Householder's election in 2018, the complaint says, coupled with

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bankrolling a successful effort led by the former House speaker to get the Republican-dominated general assembly to pass HB6, which was supported by only 10 House Democrats.

Householder and Borges were once two of the top influential Republicans in Ohio, until authorities came lurking around, including the FBI, and the IRS.

A Republican political consultant and ally to former Ohio GOP governor John Kasich, Borges was chair of the state GOP party from 2013 until former president Donald Trump assumed office in January of 2017. He is a Trump critic and lobbied against the former president's failed reelection bid in 2020.

Republicans and Democrats alike removed the former House speaker from office in June of 2021, and before his trial, the House voting 75-21 to expel the embattled state representative for his role in the multi-million dollar pay-to-play scheme. The House had voted 90-0 in July of 2020 to remove Householder as speaker, a week after he and four other Republican affiliates, including Borges, were arrested in the case.

Householder is the first member to be expelled from the Ohio House of Representatives in 164

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years, He called his expulsion while his criminal case is pending undemocratic and said the basis for it, disorderly conduct, is ludicrous. And he called it a disrespect to voters.

"They have taken away the vote of the 72nd house district and disenfranchised voters," Householder told reporters after his expulsion

But state House Democrats, led by then minority leader Emilia Sykes, now a congresswoman out of Akron, said then that it was long overdue and should have been done sooner, and some Republican state lawmakers angry with the former speaker's misgivings echoed the sentiment.

Republican Brian Steward co-sponsored the expulsion resolution and told reporters after it passed that if bribery, money laundering and racketeering are not disorderly conduct then what is. Robert Culp, a Republican and speaker of the House at the time also pushed expulsion of his former ally. He said then that "now we can put this behind us."

Culp was succeeded earlier this year as House speaker by Rep Jason Stephens, a rural southern Ohio Republican.

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