

Mike Espy's Real Record in Agriculture

While Mike Espy talks about his experience in agriculture, there's some pretty important context he's leaving out. In 1994, he was forced out in disgrace as the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture under President Bill Clinton over allegations he improperly accepted gifts from lobbyists and businesses. He was eventually indicted on 39 felony charges. His Chief of Staff, Ronald H. Blackley, went to prison.

Mississippians deserve a Senator who they know will be in Washington fighting for them, not one who has a track record of going to Washington to benefit himself. For more on Espy's shady past as Secretary of Agriculture, please see below.

IN 1997, ESPY WAS INDICTED ON 39 FELONY CHARGES, RESULTING IN 14 OTHER CONVICTIONS, MORE THAN \$10 MILLION IN FINES, AND FORCING HIM FROM OFFICE

Espy Was Indicted On 39 Felony Charges Related To "Unlawful Gratuities, Lying And Concealment Before Federal Agencies, Fraud, And Related Offenses."

In August 1997, Espy Was Indicted By A Federal Grand Jury That Said He, His Brother, And His Girlfriend Had Received More Than \$35,000 In Favors From Large Companies With Interests Before The Government During His Time As Secretary Of Agriculture Under President Bill Clinton. "Mike Espy, President Clinton's first Agriculture Secretary, was indicted today by a Federal grand jury that said he, his brother and his girlfriend had received more than \$35,000 in favors from large companies with interests before the Government. Mr. Espy then tried to cover up some of the gifts, the indictment said." (Stephen Labaton, "Agriculture Chief In '93-'94 Cabinet Is Indicted By U.S.," [The New York Times](#), 8/28/97)

Espy Was Indicted On 39 Felony Charges. "He was indicted on 39 felony charges that include mail and wire fraud, violations of the Meat Inspection Act of 1907, taking illegal gratuities, making false statements and tampering with a witness." (Stephen Labaton, "Agriculture Chief In '93-'94 Cabinet Is Indicted By U.S.," [The New York Times](#), 8/28/97)

- **Prosecutors On The Case Said Espy Accepted Tickets To Professional Sporting Events Among Other Lavish Gifts, Cash Payments To His Girlfriend, And A \$10,000 Contribution To His Brother's Unsuccessful Campaign For Congress.** "Prosecutors say Mr. Espy broke the law by accepting tickets to professional basketball, football and tennis events as well as other gifts. The gifts included a Waterford crystal bowl, luggage, lavish cross-country trips, cash payments to his girlfriend and a \$10,000 contribution to his brother Henry's unsuccessful campaign for Congress." (Stephen Labaton, "Agriculture Chief In '93-'94 Cabinet Is Indicted By U.S.," [The New York Times](#), 8/28/97)
- **Prosecutors Also Said That Espy Failed To Report The Gifts Properly, Misled President Clinton's Chief Of Staff And Investigators, And Asked A Department Of Agriculture Official To Alter A Document Regarding A Lobbyist Paying For A Trip To A NFL Playoff Game.** "Mr. Espy then failed to report the gifts properly and misled Federal investigators and President Clinton's chief of staff about them, prosecutors said. They said Mr. Espy also asked an Agriculture official to alter a

document requested by the inspector general about a lobbyist who paid for his and his girlfriend's trip to a National Football League playoff game in Dallas in 1994.” (Stephen Labaton, “Agriculture Chief In '93-'94 Cabinet Is Indicted By U.S.,” [The New York Times](#), 8/28/97)

The Office Of Independent Counsel (OIC) Said They Investigated All Allegations Brought Forward Against Espy In Their Jurisdiction And “Brought Numerous Indictments For Unlawful Gratuities, Lying And Concealment Before Federal Agencies, Fraud, And Related Offenses.” “The Office of Independent Counsel (OIC) investigated all these allegations relating to Espy's conduct, and all other matters related to its jurisdiction that arose from the investigation. In the end, it brought numerous indictments for unlawful gratuities, lying and concealment before federal agencies, fraud, and related offenses.” (Donald Smaltz, “Final Report Of The Independent Counsel In Re: Alphonso Michael (Mike) Espy,” [Office Of Independent Counsel](#), 10/25/01)

- **OIC Found That “Companies With Financially Important Matters Pending Before USDA Gave Secretary Espy -Either Directly Or Via Members Of His Family Or His Girlfriend -Numerous Gifts In An Effort To Garner His Favor.”** “The Office of Independent Counsel's (OIC) investigation into the receipt of gifts and gratuities by former Agriculture Secretary Alphonso Michael Espy revealed a pervasive pattern of improper behavior by Secretary Espy and his top aide, and by persons and companies regulated by or with business before the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). The investigation disclosed that, among other offenses, companies with financially important matters pending before USDA gave Secretary Espy - either directly or via members of his family or his girlfriend - numerous gifts in an effort to garner his favor.” (Donald Smaltz, “Final Report Of The Independent Counsel In Re: Alphonso Michael (Mike) Espy,” [Office Of Independent Counsel](#), 10/25/01)

At His Trial, Espy Did Not Dispute Receiving The Gifts But “He Argued That These Gifts Did Not Affect The Decisions He Made And That He Did Not Have The Criminal Intent Required For A Conviction.” “At trial, Espy did not dispute receipt of the gifts, but he argued that these gifts did not affect the decisions he made and that he did not have the criminal intent required for a conviction. After a two-month trial, the jury found former Secretary Espy not guilty on all counts.” (Donald Smaltz, “Final Report Of The Independent Counsel In Re: Alphonso Michael (Mike) Espy,” [Office Of Independent Counsel](#), 10/25/01)

Despite Espy Not Being Charged, The OIC Investigation Led To 14 Convictions, \$10 Million In Fines, And The Ousting Of Espy From His Position Of Secretary Of Agriculture

The OIC Investigation Resulted In 14 Convictions. “All told, OIC charged thirteen individuals (including Espy) and six business entities with criminal violations regarding the provision of gifts and gratuities to the former Secretary of Agriculture, the concealment of gratuities from federal investigators, and/or related offenses. Of these, 14 were convicted of or pleaded guilty to one or more offenses, and four were acquitted of all charges; one person was placed into a pre-trial diversion program. OIC also instituted civil prosecutions against two corporations and referred several matters to other federal enforcement agencies.” (Donald Smaltz, “Final Report Of The Independent Counsel In Re: Alphonso Michael (Mike) Espy,” [Office Of Independent Counsel](#), 10/25/01)

The Investigation Also Resulted In “More Than \$10 Million In Criminal Fines, Civil Recoveries, And Restitutionary Orders.” “In total, OIC collected more than \$10 million in criminal fines, civil recoveries, and restitutionary orders for the United States Treasury.”

(Donald Smaltz, “Final Report Of The Independent Counsel In Re: Alphonso Michael (Mike) Espy,” [Office Of Independent Counsel](#), 10/25/01)

Despite Proving That Espy Accepted The Gifts In Question, The Independent Counsel Was Unable To Convince The Jury That Espy Did Anything In Return For Them. “The jury acquitted Espy, 45, of illegally taking tickets to sporting events and other benefits from Tyson Foods Inc., the Arkansas-based poultry giant; Sun-Diamond Growers of California, a large fruit and nut cooperative; Oglethorpe Power Corp. of Georgia; Smith Barney Inc., the international banking and securities firm; EOP Group Inc., a political and business consulting firm in Washington; and Quaker Oats Co. of Chicago. Jurors also acquitted him of charges that he lied to investigators and on financial disclosure forms. Although Smaltz showed Espy received the gifts, he failed to demonstrate that Espy did anything in return for them. The law permits officials to receive gifts out of friendship or a desire to establish warm feelings, so long as the items are not ‘for or because of official acts.’” (Bill Miller, “Espy Acquitted In Gifts Case,” [The Washington Post](#), 12/3/98)

However, The Allegations Led To Espy Being Forced Out Of His Position As Secretary Of Agriculture. “Former agriculture secretary Mike Espy, forced out of office in 1994 by allegations that he improperly took gifts from businesses and lobbyists, was acquitted yesterday of 30 corruption charges brought against him by an independent counsel whom Espy likened to a ‘schoolyard bully.’” (Bill Miller, “Espy Acquitted In Gifts Case,” [The Washington Post](#), 12/3/98)

ESPY TRAVELED EXTENSIVELY ON THE TAXPAYERS DIME AND NEVER EXPLAINED HOW HE JUSTIFIED CHARGING THE GOVERNMENT FOR HIS TRIPS

As The Secretary of Agriculture, Espy “Incorporated Personal Side Trips And Political Appearances” Into Trips Billed To The Government

Espy’s Travel Records From His Time As Secretary Of Agriculture Show That He “Incorporated Personal Side Trips And Political Appearances Into His Official Agriculture Department Travels,” Where Espy Would Say He Was On Duty “Although His Schedule Reflects Minimal Work.” ““Espy’s five binders of travel records, released in response to Freedom of Information Act requests, show that he incorporated personal side trips and political appearances into his official Agriculture Department travels. Many of the Mississippi trips are scheduled around weekends, with Espy reporting himself on duty although his schedule reflects minimal work.” (Sharon LaFraniere and Susan Schmidt, “Espy Billed U.S. for Monthly Trips Home; Agriculture Secretary Says He Regrets ‘Appearance of Impropriety,’” [The Washington Post](#), 9/17/94)

Espy’s Began Making Government-Paid Trips Home To Jackson, Mississippi “The Day After His Jan. 21, 1993, Senate Confirmation.” “Espy’s government-paid trips to Jackson began the day after his Jan. 21, 1993, Senate confirmation and continued until this spring, when questions began about his acceptance of trips and gifts from firms regulated by his department.” (Sharon LaFraniere and Susan Schmidt, “Espy Billed U.S. for Monthly Trips Home; Agriculture Secretary Says He Regrets ‘Appearance of Impropriety,’” [The Washington Post](#), 9/17/94)

The Travel Records Released By Espy Did Not “Fully Explain How He Justifies Billing The Government For Some Trips.” “The agriculture secretary's statement said he has released far more documents than he had to because he is ‘a man with a clear conscience.’ But the records do not fully explain how he justifies billing the government for some trips.” (Sharon LaFraniere and Susan Schmidt, “Espy Billed U.S. for Monthly Trips Home; Agriculture Secretary Says He Regrets ‘Appearance of Impropriety,’” *The Washington Post*, 9/17/94)