



Boosters say HealthSouth ex-CEO paid for support

Reuters

BIRMINGHAM, Alabama - One of Richard Scrushy's staunchest supporters during his criminal trial said he was paid for his support by the former HealthSouth Corp. <HLSH.PK> chief executive and to plant sympathetic stories in a local newspaper serving the African-American community.

Rev. Herman Henderson, a regular presence in the courtroom during Scrushy's trial, and Audry Lewis -- the author of the stories in the Birmingham Times -- said they were paid \$45,000 for public relations services. In a further twist, they claim Scrushy still owes them \$105,000.

A predominantly black Birmingham jury in June found Scrushy not guilty of all charges stemming from a \$2.7 billion accounting fraud at HealthSouth that he was accused of directing.

"What we agreed to was to be present and witness in the courtroom, gather pastors in court, set up speeches in churches and write good articles," said Henderson, pastor of Believer's Temple Church.

Scrushy vehemently denied he paid Henderson to rally support from the African-American community.

"He's lying. I am shocked he calls himself a pastor," Scrushy said through his publicist.

"My foundation donated to his church building fund and to a (Hurricane) Katrina relief effort that his church sponsored," Scrushy said. "That's it. Period!"

Audry Lewis, who wrote articles favorable to Scrushy that often appeared on the front page of The Birmingham Times, said she sent drafts to Scrushy for editing and approval.

The Lewis Group, a public relations company run by the newspaper's founder, Jesse Lewis Sr., issued a \$5,000 check to Audry Lewis on April 29, 2005, documents produced by Henderson show. Audry Lewis and Jesse Lewis are not related.

The company wrote another \$5,000 check to Henderson on the same day, according to the documents.

Scrushy issued a statement insisting Henderson was not hired by Scrushy or his defense team in an effort to sway jurors.

"When I found out that Reverend Henderson was representing to people that he was somehow working for me through The Lewis Group, I called Mr. Lewis and told him in no circumstances did I want Reverend Henderson employed on my behalf," Scrushy said in the statement.

"Reverend Henderson has continued to dog me for money even though I never asked him to perform any services for me."

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