

# *U.S. Ends Corruption Case Against Former Virginia Governor*

By Alan Blinder

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The Justice Department said Thursday that it would abandon its case against Robert McDonnell, a former governor of Virginia, whose career was upended by a corruption conviction that the United States Supreme Court overturned in June.

Federal prosecutors also said that they would end an associated case against Mr. McDonnell's wife, Maureen.

The decisions, made public in filings to the United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit, effectively concluded a political, legal and filial drama that mesmerized and embarrassed Virginia, where the McDonnells were accused of a criminal bargain with a dietary supplements executive.

"After carefully considering the Supreme Court's recent decision and the principles of federal prosecution, we have made the decision not to pursue the case further," the Justice Department said in a three-paragraph statement after the filings were submitted.

The terse end to the matter was, in some ways, expected after the Supreme Court ruled for Mr. McDonnell, a Republican, in June and narrowed the range of behavior that qualifies as public corruption. The court's ruling did not guarantee the close of Mr. McDonnell's legal problems — until Thursday, it was unclear whether prosecutors would seek to retry him under the tapered standard — but it was a reassuring one for him and his supporters.

“We have said from the very first day that Bob McDonnell is an innocent man,” his lawyers, Henry W. Asbill and Noel J. Francisco, said in a statement. “After a long ordeal traversing the entire legal system, that truth has finally prevailed. We are thrilled Governor McDonnell can finally move on from the nightmare of the last three years and begin rebuilding his life.”

The lawyers added that they believed the Justice Department had “brought this case in good faith based on its view of the law as it existed at the time.”

Ms. McDonnell’s lawyer, William A. Burck, issued a similar statement: “We thank the Department of Justice for the care with which they reviewed the case. We are thrilled and thankful that Maureen can now move on with her life.”

The McDonnells were charged in 2014, soon after Mr. McDonnell left office, in an indictment that presaged a sensational trial in Richmond, the Virginia capital. During the five-week trial, prosecutors depicted the former first couple as materialistic to the point of corruption because they accepted luxury gifts and low-interest loans from Jonnie R. Williams Sr., who sought the governor’s help in advancing his business interests.

The benefits and gifts, including a Rolex, designer clothes and financial aid for a daughter’s wedding, were worth more than \$175,000. Although the gifts were allowed under Virginia law, prosecutors successfully argued to a jury that the McDonnells, whose legal fates were often seen as intertwined, had violated federal anticorruption statutes. A judge later sentenced Mr. McDonnell to two years in prison, and Ms. McDonnell to a little more than a year.

Corruption experts were divided Thursday about whether the Justice Department’s decisions reflected a new approach to corruption cases in the wake of the Supreme Court’s unanimous decision.

“The Department of Justice views this decision as having a material effect on the way they’ve been prosecuting quid pro quo cases in the past,” said Anthony M. Capozzolo, a former federal prosecutor, who interpreted the McDonnells’ decisions as “a sign that they’re going to handle these cases differently.”

Still, others noted the extent to which prosecutorial decisions hinge on the facts and circumstances of specific cases.

“When a new legal standard is articulated by the Supreme Court and there’s a need to potentially retry the case, prosecutors make a very particularized assessment as to whether, No. 1, they can still convince a jury of the individual’s guilt under the new standard, and, two, whether it’s in the interests of justice,” said Arlo Devlin-Brown, a former chief of the public corruption unit in the United States attorney’s office in Manhattan.

Mr. McDonnell’s lawyers did not say in Thursday’s statement whether the former governor might try to resuscitate a political career that had spawned speculation about a presidential bid. But an August poll commissioned by The Washington Post suggested that Mr. McDonnell would face a daunting political landscape in the commonwealth, with some two-thirds of respondents saying that he should not seek office again.

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