

# Did a Thornburgh dirty deal backfire?

by Steve Komm and Jeff Steinberg

Attorney General Richard Thornburgh had a rotten Memorial Day this year. The *New York Times*, the so-called “newspaper of record,” delivered a one-two punch with a news article by correspondent Neil A. Lewis, recounting the cocaine probe into one of the Attorney General’s most trusted aides, Henry Barr, while syndicated columnist William Safire, citing the Lewis piece, tore into Thornburgh for his selective handling of the Barr affair while using the most underhanded and unscrupulous tactics to nail Washington, D.C. Mayor Marion Barry on far less serious drug charges. Safire ended his attack by calling for a special prosecutor to probe the “ ‘Pennsylvania Mafia’ at Justice.”

As our regular readers know, *EIR* has been ahead of the rest of the media in exposing Thornburgh’s dirty activity to public scrutiny. Virtually all of the information reported by Lewis and Safire on May 28 has been featured in *EIR* going back to March of this year.

Yet, with all of the attention, not one word has been uttered from the mouth of Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Sen. Joseph Biden (D-Del.), the man most appropriately situated to formally request the appointment of a special prosecutor.

When it was revealed in another *New York Times* story on May 26 that, for the first time in history, a serving attorney general had been forced—under protest—to submit to a polygraph examination by the FBI and his own Criminal Division at the Department of Justice (DoJ), everybody with their head screwed on straight in the nation’s capital turned toward Biden, expecting to hear those two magic words: “special prosecutor.”

In the weeks leading up to the Thornburgh polygraph revelation, well-placed sources in the Pennsylvania Republican Party hierarchy began providing some possible explanations to *EIR* for Biden’s silence. According to these former Thornburgh GOP associates, the ex-governor of the Quaker State has information that Senator Biden received a big contribution from Pennsylvania organized crime-linked circles in the summer of 1987 to his 1988 presidential campaign, and that the Delaware senator has no interest in seeing the Attorney General using that information against him.

Adding further credence to this as yet uncorroborated accusation, other Pennsylvania sources have reported that Thornburgh has put out the word to his political patrons to

sock money into Biden’s 1990 reelection campaign chest. It seems that self-preservation arrangements run much deeper than party allegiances.

According to these sources, the Biden-Thornburgh alliance also involves another member of the Senate Judiciary Committee, longtime Thornburgh home-state colleague Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.). Specter reportedly solicited the Attorney General’s aid in targeting Rep. William Gray (D-Pa.), the popular and powerful House Democrat whom Specter feared would pose a serious challenge to his reelection bid. According to this story, Thornburgh’s “Pennsylvania Mafia” set about leaking a potentially damaging false story about grand jury probes into corruption on Gray’s staff last year, just days after House Speaker Rep. Jim Wright (D-Tex.) and Democratic Whip Rep. Tony Coelho (D-Calif.) had been forced to leave office in the face of corruption scandals.

A bit of circumstantial corroboration of this story came out in the May 26 *New York Times* story, which identified acting Philadelphia U.S. Attorney Michael M. Baylson as a third DoJ official who flunked an FBI polygraph test during the probe of the Gray leak to CBS News. Baylson has been identified by Pennsylvania Republicans as a longtime campaign aide and counsel to Senator Specter.

## Pennsylvania scandals haunt Thornburgh

Why did Thornburgh oblige Specter’s request for such a low-down trick as the Gray leak? One version says that Thornburgh was concerned about mounting scandals back in Harrisburg—including an ongoing drug probe of top aides (both past and present) and continuing demands for an investigation into the circumstances that led former Pennsylvania State Treasurer and Republican Party activist Budd Dwyer to take his own life in front of a press conference in Harrisburg in January 1987. And he wanted his trusted crony, James “Jimmy” West, the acting U.S. Attorney, to be confirmed in that post to ensure that his own hide was protected. Specter reportedly obliged and sent a letter to the White House asking that the West nomination be formally placed before the Judiciary Committee for consideration.

Senator Biden had already signaled his willingness to play ball with the Pennsylvanians. At the end of 1986, he had refused to act on a plea from Budd Dwyer to open up a Senate inquiry into the Thornburgh-ordered “sting” that had resulted in his frame-up conviction. Biden had deferred to Specter who had assured him that the Dwyer case had been handled on the up and up.

At the close of his *New York Times* column calling for a special prosecutor to probe the Thornburgh mafia at Justice, Safire predicted that Mayor Barry will outlast Thornburgh in office. If the sharp-tongued columnist is to be proven correct, it may be that two members of the Senate Judiciary Committee have to be asked some tough questions themselves. Otherwise, Richard Thornburgh may survive through his body-guard of lies.