

'Bugsy' Thornburgh running for Senate

by Jeffrey Steinberg and Steve Komm

On March 19, 1970, Richard Thornburgh delivered a keynote address at the annual banquet of the University of Pittsburgh *Law Review* in which he advocated the legalization of drugs, gambling, and prostitution. Using rhetoric that has since become the official line of the dope lobby, Thornburgh told the audience:

"If we are really serious about organized crime, we ought to first make a clear decision as to how to deal with so-called consensual crimes such as gambling, narcotics, and prostitution, which form the backbone of organized crime's enterprise. . . . It is necessary to reexamine traffic in these morally unacceptable goods and services and determine whether they, like alcohol, should be legalized under appropriate controls to achieve a similar end."

At the time he made these remarks, Thornburgh was the newly appointed United States Attorney for the Western District of Pennsylvania.

Thornburgh left his post as George Bush's Attorney General in August in order to run for the U.S. Senate seat left vacant by the death last April of John Heinz. Already these early remarks have come back to haunt him, with one local newspaper, the *Pittsburgh Press*, probing Thornburgh, who served two terms as governor of Pennsylvania, for an explanation for these super-liberal views in light of his more recent, near-obsessive advocacy of the death penalty, excessive jail terms, and other draconian police-state measures.

Front-man for organized crime?

Thornburgh claims his 1970 remarks were misquoted or misunderstood. But on the basis of an ongoing *EIR* investigation, an alternative explanation is more plausible: Richard Thornburgh has always been in the hip pocket of organized crime.

From 1960 until his appointment as U.S. Attorney for the Western District of Pennsylvania in 1969, Richard Thornburgh was a partner in the Pittsburgh law firm of Kirpatrick and Lockhart. According to a string of Pennsylvania attorneys and government officials interviewed by *EIR*, some of Thornburgh's most important clients for the firm were among the shadiest characters in the area.

According to two area sources, Thornburgh was associated in the early 1960s with an illegal gambling operation centered in New Kensington, Pennsylvania run by mobster Frank "Frinkie" Phillips. Phillips and 23 other men were busted by the Internal Revenue Service in August 1961 for running a floating gambling casino and failing to pay taxes on their illicit income.

While the allegations of a Thornburgh link to the "Frinkie" Phillips floating gambling rackets have never surfaced in any public records, Thornburgh's links to one of western Pennsylvania's well-known mobsters, Francis "Frank" Romani, have. In the mid-1960s, Thornburgh was the attorney of record for the incorporation of a local investment firm, Investors Security Leasing Corp. (ISLC). The firm ostensibly managed individual investors' stocks, mutual funds, etc.

In 1975, ISLC and a related firm, Investors Security Corp., were targeted in Securities and Exchange Commission, criminal, and civil court actions for mail fraud, securities fraud, and other crimes. According to papers filed in a civil suit by investors in the two firms, officers of both companies arranged through First National Bank and Trust Company of Washington, Pennsylvania to obtain personal loans by illegally signing over stocks to themselves without the knowledge or authorization of the investors. Company officials William H. Brown and Dale McDonald were indicted on Nov. 19, 1975 and were convicted the following June. Although he was not indicted along with Brown and McDonald, gangster Frank Romani was called as a trial witness, and he was identified as a hidden partner in the Brown-McDonald scam. Brown was also a business partner with Romani in a string of motels. Western Pennsylvania sources have named Kirpatrick and Lockhart senior partner Tom Johnson as another silent partner with Romani in some of those businesses.

Romani is now in federal prison serving a 30-year sentence for a string of crimes, including cocaine trafficking and arson. He was arrested along with his daughter and an associate on June 11, 1987 after insurance investigators provided federal officials with evidence that Romani had paid two employees to torch the Quality Inn in Johnstown, Pennsylvania in order to collect insurance money. The arson probe led to evidence that Romani was running a cocaine distribution ring from Florida to Pennsylvania. Romani and the others pled guilty to the cocaine-trafficking charges and were later convicted of arson.

Romani was also identified as a partner (along with Thornburgh law partner Johnson) in a New Castle, Pennsylvania Holiday Inn which burned down in 1977, leaving four people dead. A decade later, federal prosecutors charged that Romani was involved in torching the Holiday Inn.

A little help from his friends

Allegations of Thornburgh's ties to prominent area mobsters was a recurring theme during his 1978 campaign for

governor. On Sept. 28, 1978, the Pittsburgh *Post-Gazette* identified convicted numbers racketeer Anthony Grosso as the head of an "underground" Thornburgh for Governor campaign that was raising funds for the GOP nominee and also carrying out a dirty tricks campaign against his Democratic opponent, former Pittsburgh Mayor Pete Flaherty. Thornburgh denied the Grosso links, charging that the allegations of mob ties were a dirty trick. However, published reports revealed that a number of campaign fundraising events had been held by Grosso lieutenants and that a shadow campaign office had been set up.

Following his election as Pennsylvania's governor in 1978, Thornburgh continued to be associated with some of the area's well-known gangsters. In a May 3, 1981 Pittsburgh *Press* article, it was revealed that Thornburgh had arranged a \$10 million beer contract between the government of Taiwan and Philadelphia brewer William Pflaumer, who had been named just a year earlier in the Pennsylvania Crime Commission's annual report as a major front-man for organized crime.

Several years later, Thornburgh associates helped clear the way for a Gambino organized crime family operator in New York City, Nicky Sands, to win lucrative contracts with the Pittsburgh international airport. Prominent Pittsburgh Anti-Defamation League figure Phil Baskin was lead attorney for the Sands-Gambino deal until local media exposure of Sands's prior criminal record put the kibosh on the contract. Thornburgh's campaign manager J. Evans Rose was at the time involved in a complex series of financial deals with Baskin involving the parceling out of \$11 million in commissions for a billion dollar state highway bond issue.

At Governor Thornburgh's January 1983 inauguration celebration, a crime figure from Youngstown, Ohio, Edward DiBartolo, was among 100 guests of honor at a special party for the biggest contributors to the campaign.

Exposés promised

Pennsylvania state Democratic Party chairman Anthony May has promised that Harris Wofford, the party's nominee in the Nov. 5, 1991 special Senate election, will expose the Thornburgh sleaze factor during his campaign. May told the *Washington Times* that "the only people who have ever said Richard Thornburgh is an honorable man are Richard Thornburgh and the people paid by Richard Thornburgh. His law and order, squeaky clean image is not borne out by the facts."

There is no doubt that Anthony May is correct. What remains to be seen is whether the state Democrats, the media, and voters of Pennsylvania will take the opportunity of this special election to break with their past track record of bowing to Richard Thornburgh and his organized crime pals. The first step is a thorough exposure of "Bugsy" Thornburgh's three-decade track record.

Setbacks for Virginia 'Get LaRouche' gang

The Virginia branch of the national "Get LaRouche" task force received two setbacks at the end of August, in its efforts to silence the political organizing and fundraising of the associates of jailed statesman Lyndon LaRouche.

Judge Clifford Weckstein of Roanoke, Virginia dismissed "securities fraud" charges against Barbara Boyd on Aug. 26, because the prosecution had violated her right to a speedy trial. Boyd was indicted in 1987, along with 15 others, on trumped-up charges to the effect that political loans constituted "securities" and therefore that their solicitation required registration as a broker. Such a bizarre view has never been applied before or since in the Commonwealth of Virginia to any political organizers *not* associated with LaRouche.

Judge Weckstein issued a one-page statement saying that the dismissal was unique to the circumstances of this case. Boyd had originally been scheduled to be tried in December 1989, but the prosecution for its own reasons balked at going to trial at the scheduled time. Instead, the Commonwealth tried Boyd's codefendant Michael Billington, who was convicted and sentenced to 77 years in prison.

This is the first time that charges against any LaRouche associate have been dropped in Virginia.

Then, on Aug. 29, Loudoun County, Va. Judge Carleton Penn ruled against an attempt by prosecutor John Russell to revoke the bail of Rochelle Ascher, who was convicted on "securities fraud" charges in 1989, and whose appeal was recently denied. Ascher was sentenced by the jury that convicted her to an unheard-of 86 years in prison; the trial judge commuted the sentence to 10 years.

John Flannery, Ascher's attorney, argued that Penn had no jurisdiction to revoke bail, because under the law, bail continues until all appeals are exhausted, and Ascher had already filed a petition for a rehearing before the entire Appeals Court. Furthermore, Flannery said that the prosecution had filed a motion in May 1990 claiming that Ascher was a danger to the community, and no evidence has ever been presented to back that up.

Judge Penn ruled that until the Appeals Court sends him an order allowing him to revoke Ascher's bail, he has no authority to do so. He said since the prosecution had elected not to present any evidence that Ascher was a danger to the community, he had no basis to revoke her bail.