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## MCI case leader defends work for AG

2/4/2008 7:38:44 AM  
 Daily Journal  
 BY BOBBY HARRISON  
 Daily Journal Jackson Bureau

William Quin doesn't back down despite often intense criticism of the \$100 million-plus settlement he won for the state from MCI as an outside counsel working for the office of Attorney General Jim Hood.

"I am proud of what I accomplished in that case," said Quin, a Kentwood, La., native who now lives in Tupelo with his wife and two young children - soon to be three.

As the public debate intensifies on the merits of the Attorney General's office hiring outside counsel on a contingency-fee basis to pursue lawsuits against large corporations, names of high-profile attorneys like Richard "Dickie" Scruggs of Oxford and Joey Langston of Booneville often surface.

Langston, who partnered with Quin in the MCI case, recently pleaded guilty in a judiciary bribery investigation and Scruggs is under indictment on similar charges.

They often are cited by those wanting to put restrictions on the ability of the Attorney General's office to hire outside counsel, even though there has been no indication from investigators that there was any wrongdoing in the cases where Scruggs and Langston represented the state.

The indictment of Scruggs and the guilty verdict by Langston are indications that "the system is broken and needs to be fixed," said Senate Judiciary A Chairman Joey Fillingane, R-Sumrall.

Said Sen. Alan Nunnelee, R-Tupelo: "I'm uncomfortable with the whole issue of attorneys bringing cases to the AG and saying you need to file a lawsuit."

Hood has said that in a few instances the expertise, financing and manpower of private attorneys are needed. There are currently fewer than 20 such cases in which outside counsel represents the state.

Hood said often the case is discovered by attorneys through their own research.

Quin's baby  
 Even before the current judicial bribery investigation, everyone knew Langston worked on the MCI case, but nobody knew



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the name Billy Quin - even though in almost every way possible the case was his baby.

"The reason Joey got all the publicity is because he is Joey," Quin said recently. "Everybody knows who he is. Nobody knew me."

Quin paused for a second, which is rare for a man who is sure of himself and his words, and added, "Nothing he has done (wrong) had anything to do with the MCI case. I was there. I was the only one there at the beginning and one of only three when it ended. Nobody was more involved than me."

The beginning came earlier this decade when WorldCom collapsed and ended up in bankruptcy. Quin, a young Jackson attorney working for the Louisiana-based firm Lundy & Davis, was studying the WorldCom issue because he had clients who had invested in the company.

In the course of that study, he came to the conclusion that WorldCom, through the company that it became after bankruptcy, MCI, might owe the state millions - perhaps a billion dollars - in back taxes.

Quin wanted to meet with newly elected Attorney General Jim Hood in 2004 about representing the state in trying to collect the back taxes.

Hood did not know the young attorney or in any substantial manner anyone in Quin's firm.

On top of that, Hood said he thought it a waste of time to pursue back taxes owed by a company in bankruptcy court in New York.

As a favor to a former employee of the Attorney General's office, Trey Bobinger, Hood agreed to meet with Quin. Quin and Bobinger knew each other because they had seats close to each other at Ole Miss football games - where they both graduated.

"I told Trey I would meet with him, but I might not listen," Hood recalled. But Hood did listen and had enough memory of his tax law classes to realize that Quin might have a case - perhaps not an iron-clad case, but one worth pursuing.

Hood agreed to give the young attorney, only 32 at the time, an outside counsel contract if enough financing could be found to pursue the case.

The private attorneys would finance the case themselves and receive a percentage of the settlement - no more than 25 percent - if they won. If they lost, they would get nothing and be out their time and investment.

Quin said Lundy & Davis was involved in time-consuming and expensive environmental litigation. The firm would definitely need financing help for a case that could cost more than \$1 million to pursue and Quin might need manpower help.

Enter Joey Langston - the smooth-talking, small-town Booneville attorney with a statewide reputation as a successful attorney in both criminal and civil law.

Hood said he contacted several attorneys from big plaintiffs firms about the case, but no one seemed interested except Langston.

Langston a natural

In many ways Langston was a natural for the case. While Quin did not know him, Langston had been in college at Millsaps with one of the principals of Lundy & Davis and had a personal friendship with Hood that crossed generational lines. Hood's and Langston's fathers - both attorneys - also knew each other.

Langston also was one of Hood's primary campaign donors, which led to some of the criticism of Hood's decision to hire



  
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him for the case.

Quin said at the time he was not a Hood campaign donor and does not believe anyone in his Louisiana law firm was a donor.

The team of Quin and Langston ended up with a settlement of \$100 million in cash for the state and about \$10 million in property from MCI.

What has created the stir is the \$14 million in attorney's fees. It often is reported in the media that Langston earned \$14 million. But in reality, Quin said Lundy & Davis and the Langston firm split the fees - each receiving \$7 million.

As auditor, current Lt. Gov. Phil Bryant tried to recoup some of the fees, saying the attorneys received them illegally. Hood and Quin both dispute that and legal action is pending on the issue. Efforts could occur in the Legislature to deal with the fees Quin, Langston and the other attorneys received.

While the attorneys were working on a contingency-fee basis, Quin said the fees the attorneys received were negotiated separately from the settlement the state received. The attorneys received none of the state settlement, both he and Hood say.

But Quin said that for the sake of argument, if the \$14 million in attorneys' fees were added to the total settlement, it would mean the \$14 million represents 11 percent of the total settlement - far below the percentage attorneys normally receive.

An ill-fated move

Since that day Quin first met Hood, his life has changed in many ways. After the MCI case was settled, Langston persuaded Quin to join his law firm in Booneville.

Quin moved from Jackson to Tupelo in January 2007 to do that. Then the bombshell occurred a year later when Langston pleaded guilty to the federal charges and had to give up his law license.

Quin is looking to move on. He said he might start his own firm or join another one. Remaining in Tupelo is possible.

He said his decision will be based on what he believes is best for his family.

"I intend to keep them in the forefront of my decision-making process," Quin said.

Contact Daily Journal Jackson Bureau reporter Bobby Harrison at (601)-353-3119 or [bobby.harrison@djjournal.com](mailto:bobby.harrison@djjournal.com).

*Appeared originally in the Northeast Mississippi Daily Journal, 2/4/2008, section A , page 1*