

## Jury convicts Reynolds in sex abuse case

CHICAGO — Rep. Mel Reynolds was convicted Tuesday of having sex with a former campaign worker while she was underage, then trying to thwart the investigation.

As the verdict was read, the Illinois Democrat sat expressionless. He repeatedly mouthed an inaudible phrase and looked at the jury as the verdict was read. His wife and mother sat next to each other in the courtroom with little expression on their faces.

Reynolds testified that he never had sex with campaign volunteer Beverly Heard and only fantasized about it over the phone. The black

congressman said he is the target of a racially biased, politically motivated prosecution.

Jurors deliberated more than 14 hours before reaching their verdict.

The most serious charge, criminal sexual assault, carries a mandatory minimum penalty of four years in prison. Reynolds also was convicted on charges of sexual abuse, child pornography and obstruction of justice.

Prosecutors built their case on graphic tape-recorded telephone calls in which Reynolds discusses sex acts with his teen-age accuser. But the trial ultimately focused on the conflicting

testimony of Reynolds, 43, a two-term Democrat, and 19-year-old accuser Beverly Heard.

After 13 nights in jail for refusing to testify, Heard emerged to tell the jury she had a consensual sexual affair with Reynolds beginning in 1992 when she was 16 and 17. But she said he doesn't deserve prison and asked the jury to find him innocent.

Reynolds testified that he succumbed to his weakness and had phone sex with Heard but never had physical contact with her. He accused Heard of trying to extort him and said prosecu-

tors used "Gestapo tactics" in an out-of-control effort to convict him.

Prosecutor Andrea Zopp denied that race and politics played a role. "The defendant sits here today not because he's a congressman, not because he's an African-American, but because he committed a crime," she said in closing arguments.

Heard launched the case in June 1994 by contacting police but stunned prosecutors by recanting within weeks of telling her story. Prosecutors accused Reynolds of engineering the about face.

The case was just one of several accusations against Reynolds.

In May he was indicted again on witness tampering and obstruction of justice for trying to influence witnesses in the sex case. It is unclear when he might face trial on those charges.

For at least a year, federal authorities have been investigating possible mishandling of Reynolds' personal, campaign and congressional finance. That includes whether he fraudulently obtained a mortgage for a new house and whether he converted campaign or office funds to personal use.

## Teen arraigned in bridge death; authorities say victim jumped

DETROIT — A 19-year-old man pleaded innocent to murder Tuesday in the death of a woman who police said jumped off a bridge to escape an attack. Investigators meanwhile backed off their original story that onlookers cheered the assault.

Deletha Word, 33, apparently was not pushed but leapt off the Belle Isle bridge on her own, and some witnesses even said her attacker told her not to jump, police Cmdr. Gerald Stewart said.

"We know for a fact that she was not pushed over," Stewart said Tuesday. "She was probably trying to escape."

There is no evidence to support initial police reports that a crowd cheered as Word was attacked early Saturday, Stewart said.

The earlier reports were probably "just an exaggeration of some of the people out there," he said.

Wayne County Assistant Prosecutor Richard Padzieski also said the early reports were wrong.

"There's nothing to indicate there was a mob cheering on the attackers," Padzieski said. "It was

not the mood of the group."

Stewart said the story may have stemmed from people honking their horns at the backed-up traffic, or yelling in horror when they saw the woman jump.

"When you know what really happened," he said, "it's bad, but not like it's been portrayed."

Others contradicted Stewart's version. Family members have said they doubt Word jumped because she did not know how to swim.

"Everybody's sugarcoating this, and I see no reason for it," Dortha Word said of her daughter's death.

And in court, Magistrate Kerry Leon Jackson read from a report that quoted a witness as saying the suspect held Word and said, "I should throw this bitch over the bridge."

Bail for Martell Welch was set at \$250,000 for a charge of second-degree murder, punishable by up to life in prison. Jackson set a preliminary hearing for Sept. 1.

Welch attended Wayne State University in Detroit as a freshman this year and planned to attend East-

ern Michigan University in the fall to study architectural design, his lawyer said.

Word had a 13-year-old daughter and worked at a grocery store while earning a bachelor's degree in marketing.

Witnesses told police that Word's car hit Welch's car and she drove away, but was blocked on the bridge by heavy traffic. The island park near downtown in the Detroit River is a popular hangout and cruising spot on weekends.

When Welch's car approached Word's, she reversed and hit him again. Welch got out and attacked Word's car with a crowbar, Stewart said. He said Welch then pulled her from the car, ripping her clothing as she resisted, and hit her with his fists.

Stewart said Welch chased Word, carrying his crowbar, and she jumped into the river. Her body was found miles downstream several hours later.

Two other men who had been held for questioning were released late Tuesday.

## News... in a Minute

### Heavy rains hit state

CREIGHTON — Torrential rain sent northeast Nebraska streams out of their banks Tuesday, swamping roads and storm sewers. In this town, officials asked people not to flush their toilets until the water went down.

Storms dumped up to 7 inches of rain around northeast Nebraska on Monday night and Tuesday. There were several unofficial reports of 9 inches of rain Tuesday south of Creighton, a town of 1,200 about 40 miles northwest of Norfolk. It usually takes an entire summer for 7 inches of rain to fall in southern Knox County.

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