## **Former Cabinet worker** indicted by grand jury

WASHINGTON (AP) -Former Agriculture Secretary Mike Espy was charged Wednesday with seeking and accepting more than \$35,000 in trips, sports tickets and favors from companies that did business with his agency. He was also accused of lying and tampering with witnesses to cover up.

Espy, indicted on 39 counts by a federal grand jury, joins just a handful of Cabinet secretaries ever charged with wrongdoing. The indictment portrays him as an official who persistently sought favors from large companies regulated by his agency.

Espy's Washington attorney, Reid Weingarten, said the special prosecutor in the case had taken 'trivial, personal and entirely benign activities and attempted to distort them into criminal acts." Espy himself has consistently denied any wrongdoing. His law office in Jackson, Miss., said he was not available for comment.

The indictment did not contend that Espy had given any of the companies - including such agricultural business giants as Tyson Food Inc. and Sun Diamond Growers of California - favorable treatment in return for the gifts. "A quid pro quo is not required" to prove he violated the law, said independent counsel Donald Smaltz.

But it did charge that Espy, who resigned from the Clinton administration in 1994 after Smaltz began his investigation, "solicited, received and accepted gifts" for himself, his girlfriends and his family from companies that were regulated by the Agriculture Department or regularly did business with it.

The favors included illegal campaign contributions to his brother's failed congressional campaign in Mississippi, the deletion of references to Tyson requested a limousine and driver

indictment said.

Espy also "attempted to conceal his actions by lying to a USDA inspector general representative, by lying to the Federal Bureau of Investigation and by lying to the Executive Office of the President," Smaltz said.

Espy was charged with mail and wire fraud, for accepting illegal gratuities and for taking gifts from companies regulated under the Meat Inspection Act.

The indictment charges that Espy directed an aide to solicit National Basketball Association championship playoff tickets from the chairman of Quaker Oats Co. and that he subsequently lied to the FBI about where he got them.

He is also accused of failing to report trips and gifts on the financial disclosure form that top government officials are required to file each year.

The trips included two that he and a friend, Patricia Dempsey, took to a National Football League game in Dallas and to the U.S. Open tennis tournament in New York City. The couple were provided with limousines both times.

The Dallas trip was paid for by a lobbyist for Tyson Foods Inc. Sun Diamond bought tickets to the tennis tournament and paid for a \$2,427 set of luggage for the New York trip, the indictment said.

penalties of more than 100 years in prison.

If convicted of witness tampering alone, Espy could be sentenced to as many as 10 years in prison. That count accuses Espy of ordering a department employee to alter a document to conceal that Tyson lobbyist Jack L. Williams tary kept in Mississippi for per paid for the trip to Dallas in 1994 for an NFL playoff game.

66 I'm sure Tyson will have its day in court sometime in the nottoo-distant future."

## DONALD SMALTZ independent counsel

chairman Don Tyson, to Dempsey, and to the football game from an itinerary of the Dallas trip that had been requested by the USDA's inspector general.

Tyson has acknowledged that it is a target of the investigation but denies that it committed any crimes.

James Blair, the company's general counsel, said prosecutors would not be able to prove that Espy "took illegal favors from Tyson Foods."

"I don't believe that, because I don't believe it happened," Blair said.

Asked about the company's statement, Smaltz said: "I'm sure Tyson's will have its day in court sometime in the not-too-distant future.'

The indictment also charges that Espy concocted pretenses for being in Dallas and other loca-The counts carry maximum tions by scheduling speaking engagements or meetings wit local USDA officials.

Espy was also accused of spending government money for personal benefit by arranging for the Agriculture Department to pa \$6.200 toward the rental of a Jee Cherokee that the Cabinet secre sonal use. He told the agency th Jeep would serve as his officia Espy is accused of ordering the car in Washington but late

## **Bethlehem blockade** removed by Israel

BETHLEHEM, West Bank sands of Palestinian workers out (AP) - Pushing aside the red-and- of Israel, and the resumption of white barriers that had blocked traffic for nearly a month, Israel lifted its much-resented blockade of Bethlehem on Wednesday.

The move followed days of violent Palestinian street protests and international criticism including from the Vatican, which complained that Christian pilgrims were kept from visiting the birthplace of Jesus.

David Bar-Illan, a spokesman for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, said the closure, imposed after a suicide bombing July 30 in a Jerusalem market, was lifted for security reasons. He gave no further details on why security officials reversed their position.

"Something has changed that made them feel it was safe now to lift the internal closure," he said.

The gesture was expected to help improve the deeply troubled relations between Israel and Yasser Arafat's Palestinian Authority.

But Arafat spokesman Nabil Abourdeineh said it "must be followed by many other steps," including the lifting of a general closure that keeps tens of thou-

tax transfers to the Palestinian Authority.

"Things must be returned to their normal situation in order to return to the negotiating table and the protection of the peace process," he said.

The market bombing, which killed 16 people, was claimed by the Islamic militant group Hamas. Israel reportedly maintained its blockade of Bethlehem for 28 days because it suspected two masterminds of the bombing were hiding in the city.

Bar-Illan said Israel was "seeing very little by way of cooperation" from the Palestinians on security. A resumption of security cooperation between the two sides was supposed to be a prerequisite for Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's expected visit in September and a new U.S. peace initiative.

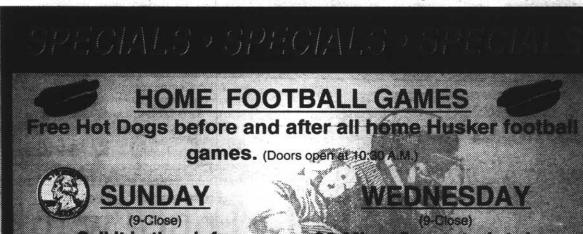
The blockade of Bethlehem was lifted shortly after 4 p.m. Wednesday. Zainab Jafari, 37, was one of the first to enter Bethlehem from the Jerusalem side.

"They didn't speak to me," she said excitedly, pointing to the Israeli troops who let her pass.

## CORRECTION

A caption in Wednesday's Daily Nebraskan misidentified a member of Fat Tire Bike Messengers. Ryan Korb was misidentified as Chris Van Ooyen.

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