

'Sensation' sparks debate in Congress

WASHINGTON (AP) - Congress waded into the battle over the Brooklyn Museum of Art's provocative "Sensation" exhibit, passing a nonbinding resolution calling for an end to federal funding for the institution.

While some Democrats denounced the Republican resolution on Monday as an attack on artistic free expression, GOP lawmakers countered that taxpayers should not have to fund the controversial art show, which critics have labeled vulgar and anti-Catholic.

The exhibit that opened Saturday to huge crowds features, among other things, a black Virgin Mary embellished with body parts and elephant dung.

"I don't think that when taxpayers said they supported art funding that this is what they had in mind," said Rep. John Sweeney, R-N.Y., who sponsored the resolution.

Republicans said they were not arguing that the work should not be shown, but that it should not receive public funding.

But Democrats said that was disingenuous.

"The issue before us is censorship. Make no mistake about it," said Rep. Maurice Hinchey, D-N.Y.

Over the last three years the Brooklyn Museum received \$1.1 million in federal money. And while Monday's resolution sparked heated debate it was purely symbolic. Republicans are attempting to attach legislation to federal spending bills to block funding to the museum, but have

so far been unsuccessful.

House Democrats also accused Republicans of pushing the resolution to rally support for New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, the exhibit's most vocal critic and a likely candidate for the U.S. Senate next year.

"I know politics when I see it," said Rep. Eliot Engel, a Bronx Democrat. "This is all about who will be the next senator from the state of New York."

Giuliani is attempting to cut off city funding to the museum because of the refusal of officials there to remove the exhibit's more controversial pieces. If Giuliani decides to run for the Senate, his likely opponent will be first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton.

Clinton has said while she personally finds the exhibit offensive she supports the museum's right to show it.

Meanwhile, Texas Gov. George W. Bush, in swing through upstate New York, threw his support behind Giuliani on Monday. "I don't think we ought to be using public moneys to denigrate religion," the GOP presidential front-runner said.

In New York City, both sides resumed their court battle, with the museum filing papers in support of a federal lawsuit accusing the city of trying to punish it for exercising free speech.

The papers included a sworn statement from director Arnold Lehman alleging Giuliani knew about the "Sensation" exhibit's controversial content long before he ever spoke out.

Bankers suspected of money laundering

NEW YORK (AP) - Federal prosecutors say \$7 billion from Russia was illegally funneled through accounts at the Bank of New York in one of the largest money laundering cases in U.S. history, according to a criminal indictment unsealed Tuesday.

Three individuals and three companies were charged with channeling the money - believed to have ties to the Russian mafia - in the first criminal charges to be brought in the case. The charges were contained in a three-count indictment filed under seal in U.S. District Court in Manhattan on Sept. 16.

Peter Berlin, 44, Lucy Edwards, 41, - a former vice president at the Bank of New York - and Aleksey Volkov, 34, as well as Benex International Co. Inc., Becs International L.L.C. and Torfinex Corp. were named as defendants. The Bank of New York, the nation's 15th-largest bank, was not named in the indictments.

U.S. Attorney Mary Jo White said in a statement that "the ongoing investigation is very intense and broad, and it is likely to go on for some time."

"Many questions about the various sources of the moneys flowing through the accounts at the Bank of New York remain to be answered," she added.

Lewis Schiliro, an FBI assistant director in charge of the New York office, said their primary focus was determining the origin of the funds and tracing the path of transactions through accounts at the Bank of New York.

"As this investigation has progressed, cooperation from the Russian authorities has been forthcoming and has been helpful," he said. "Unsealing this indictment will serve to facilitate the mutual flow of information."

Federal investigators have been working for several months in attempt to unravel the Bank of New York case. Russian businesses and individuals - including organized crime groups - are suspected of illegally laundering the \$7 billion through accounts at the bank.

The indictment alleges the defendants conspired from 1996 to August 1999 to illegally transmit funds and receive deposits through the Benex and Becs accounts at the Bank of New York.

"Many questions ... at the Bank of New York remain to be answered."

MARY JO WHITE
U.S. attorney

The defendants were charged because they allegedly engaged in an illegal banking operation by receiving deposits without obtaining authorization from any federal or state banking agency, according to prosecutors.

The indictment also seeks criminal forfeiture of various bank and brokerage accounts, including the Benex and Becs accounts as well as accounts held by Torfinex at the Bank of New York.

The indictment alleged that the defendants continued to send money illegally through the Benex and Becs accounts even after Torfinex was ordered by the New York State Department of Banking in October 1997 to stop transmitting money.

If convicted of all the charges against them, Berlin and Volkov could face up to 15 years in prison and a fine of \$175,000 or twice the gain or loss resulting from the crime.

If convicted, Edwards would face a maximum prison term of five years and a maximum fine of \$250,000 or twice the gain or loss resulting from the crime.

Edwards was dismissed last month for gross misconduct, violation of the bank's internal policies, falsification of bank records and failure to cooperate with the bank's investigation.

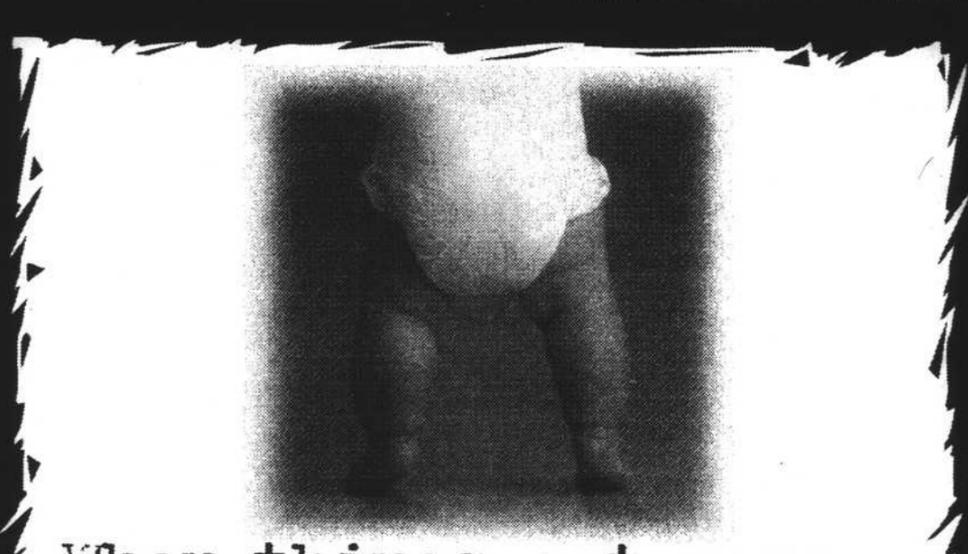
She has previously denied any wrongdoing.

If convicted, the corporate defendants could face maximum fines of \$1.5 million or twice the gain or loss.

Those accounts collectively hold about \$6.2 million and were seized when warrants were issued in August 1999.

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