

Stevens conviction, indictment tossed

by UPI

WASHINGTON -- A federal judge tossed the conviction and indictment of former U.S. Sen. Ted Stevens, R-Alaska, after the Justice Department admitted evidence was mishandled.

U.S. District Judge Emmet G. Sullivan Tuesday also initiated a criminal contempt investigation of the six federal prosecutors in the case, The Washington Post reported.

"In 25 years on the bench, I have never seen anything approach the mishandling and misconduct in this case," Sullivan said, calling the allegations "shocking and disturbing."

Last week, U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder said he would ask that Stevens's conviction and indictment on corruption charges be tossed out. During his trial last year, prosecutors repeated were chastised for their handling of evidence and witnesses.

Sullivan earlier ordered the government to hand over documents related to the allegations of misconduct by prosecutors. After reviewing the evidence, Sullivan could sanction prosecutors if he finds they intentionally violated rules covering witnesses or evidence.

Prosecutors have said they will not seek to retry the 85-year-old Stevens.

A jury convicted Stevens in October of lying on financial disclosure forms about \$250,000 worth of gifts and free home renovations. Since then, an FBI agent filed a whistleblower complaint alleging prosecutorial misconduct and Sullivan has held three top Justice lawyers in contempt.

Stevens, who was a U.S. senator from December 1968 until January 2009, lost his re-election bid by about 4,000 votes about a week after he was convicted.

Copyright © 2009, by United Press International. All Rights Reserved.

Stevens conviction, indictment tossed by UPI