Jefferson indicted

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Through much tribulation, William Jefferson, D-La., has kept a seat in the House.

Shortly before Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans in 2005, FBI agents conducting a bribery investigation found $90,000 cash in his home freezer. Days later came Katrina, with New Orleans residents trapped by deep water and National Guard troops diverted from rooftop rescues so Jefferson could retrieve items from his home.

He was nevertheless handily re-elected in 2006. But the mounting federal investigation was inimical to the pledge by new Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. She demoted Jefferson from the elite Ways and Means Committee to the Small Business Committee. Pressed by the Congressional Black Caucus, she then tried unsuccessfully to promote Jefferson to the Homeland Security Committee, where he would oversee the Federal Emergency Management Agency, excoriated for its response to Katrina in New Orleans.

Still, some constituents and politicos have considered Jefferson indispensable to federal aid for still-needy New Orleans, where millions in FEMA funds remain unaccounted for.

That indispensability argument heated up when Jefferson was indicted on 16 federal charges, including accepting bribes from businessmen and depriving the public of honest services.

Calls for his resignation also resumed as Jefferson took "temporary leave" from the Small Business Committee, a leave Pelosi may make permanent. The House could vote to boot him. In any event, New Orleans' plight no longer has his full time and attention, if it ever did. In his hometown's best interests, Jefferson should resign, allowing his city a representative who can deliver.

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