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**Money laundering; Federal jury quickly finds Rev. Wright's daughter guilty**

By Dave McKinney and Elise Dismer

Staff reporters

SPRINGFIELD - A federal jury took less than two hours Friday to find the daughter of President Barack Obama's former pastor guilty on all counts in her weeklong federal money-laundering trial that was rooted in a $1.25 million state grant-fraud scheme.

Jeri Wright, 48, of Hazel Crest, maintained her innocence as she left a Springfield courtroom, telling reporters, "I didn't do anything."

Federal prosecutors charged her in an 11-count indictment for money-laundering, lying to federal investigators and lying to a grand jury after being involved in a fraud scheme orchestrated by former Country Club Hills Police Chief Regina Evans. Wright sat frozen in her chair as the jury's clean-sweep against her was read in open court.

"The message we're sending is if you choose to engage in fraud and then lie about it, you'll be held accountable," said Assistant U.S. Attorney Timothy Bass, who prosecuted Wright's case.

With backing from state Sen. Donne Trotter, D-Chicago, and former Rep. Marlow Colvin, D-Chicago, Evans and her husband, Ronald, secured a state job-training grant designed to help minorities learn the construction trade. But state officials and federal prosecutors contend about $900,000 of that wound up going directly into the Evanses' pockets, with virtually none of the money going toward its intended use.

Both Evans and her husband have admitted to misspending state funds to renovate their Country Club Hills home, buy furniture and pay down loans on a former Chicago home and the historic but dilapidated Regal Theater, for which the couple took out a $2 million loan they couldn't repay and site where the alleged job-training was to have occurred. Both Evanses have pleaded guilty to charges related to the fraud scheme and are awaiting sentencing.

Wright, the daughter of the Rev. Jeremiah Wright and a childhood friend of Regina Evans, allegedly pocketed as much as $11,000 of the misspent state money, using it partly to pay a car loan, and allegedly lied to federal authorities and a grand jury when asked about the money.

During the trial, prosecutors showed Wright, unemployed and facing financial struggles, did no job-training work linked to the grant yet cashed approximately $31,000 in tax-funded checks, steering approximately $20,000 of that total to Evans for her personal use and depositing about $5,700 into her own account. The balance has not been accounted for.

In closing arguments, defense attorney John Taylor sought to portray his client as a "victim" and described Evans as an "evil" woman who had spun a "tangled web of lies," fooling everyone around her, including Wright.

"I don't know how Jeri could have missed the alarms, but was she engaged in a conspiracy?" Taylor asked during his closing statement. "I don't think so."

But Bass attacked that argument during his final presentation to the jury.

"Wright chose to enter this scheme with Ms. Evans," he said. "[Evans] was driving the train, but Wright willingly chose to get on the train and ride it to the end."

Sentencing has been scheduled for July 7.