

By PHILLIP RAWLS

MONTGOMERY, Ala.

Montgomery lobbyist Jarrod Massey pleaded guilty Monday in the Alabama gambling corruption case and became the second member of his lobbying firm to admit offering bribes to legislators to support pro-gambling legislation.

Massey, the lobbyist

for the closed Country Crossing casino in Dothan, appeared before U.S. Magistrate Judge Wallace Capel Jr. to plead guilty to one count of conspiracy and five counts of bribery.

"Jarrod Massey has admitted that he bribed members of the Alabama state Legislature in exchange for their votes in favor of electronic bingo gambling legislation," Assistant U.S. Attorney General Lanny Breuer said.

Massey, Country Crossing developer Ronnie Gilley, and nine others were arrested Oct. 4 on charges accusing them of buying and selling votes on pro-gambling legislation.

Gilley's lawyer, Doug Jones, said his client never authorized any bribes and trusted the well-known lobbyist to operate ethically. "Unfortunately, that trust was misplaced," he said.

Massey's lawyer, Brett Bloomston, said Massey wanted to accept responsibility for his actions and agreed to help federal prosecutors.

He is the second member of his firm, Mantra Governmental, to plead guilty. His assistant, Jennifer Pouncy, pleaded guilty Sept. 28 to conspiracy involving bribe offers.

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Massey's plea agreement discusses several other defendants, including: Milton McGregor, owner of VictoryLand Casino in Shorter and a minority owner in Country Crossing; two current state senators, Democrat Quinton Ross Jr. of Montgomery and independent Harri Anne Smith of Slocomb; and two former senators who were in the Legislature when the gambling bill was being considered last spring, Democrats Jim Preuitt of Talladega and Larry Means of Attalla.

McGregor's lawyer, Joe Espy, said Massey's plea doesn't affect his client and he looks forward to demonstrating "that Milton McGregor is not guilty of the charges brought against him."

In the plea agreement, Massey describes meetings and phone calls involving Gilley and McGregor as they sought to pass legislation designed to let their casinos keep operating highly profitable electronic bingo machines.

Massey admitted that as Country Crossing's lobbyist, he offered Preuitt \$1 million and that he authorized Pouncy to offer Preuitt substantial election assistance, including telling Pouncy they had up to \$2 million of Gilley's money to use in obtaining Preuitt's vote.

Massey also admitted promising hundreds of thousands of dollars in campaign support to an unnamed House member in 2009, offering \$1 million per year in public relations work to an unnamed state senator for his support in the spring, giving \$5,000 to Ross for his vote, and giving \$13,000 to Smith in return for her vote.

Gilley and McGregor were pushing a bill that would allow electronic bingo casinos to remain open rather than being shut down by Gov. Bob Riley's task force on illegal gambling. The bill died in the 2009 session. On the second try in spring 2010, it passed in the Senate, but died in the House after news broke that the FBI was investigating the Legislature.

The two former senators and two present senators voted for the bill.

All of Alabama's privately owned electronic bingo casinos, including Country Crossing and VictoryLand, have closed under pressure for Riley's task force. Three electronic bingo casinos operated by the Poarch Band of Creek Indians remain open in Atmore, Wetumpka and

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Massey is scheduled for sentencing Sept. 26. That is long after any testimony he might give in the April 4 trial for his 10 co-defendants.

He could received up to five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine on the conspiracy charge and 10 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine on each bribery charge.

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