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Ex-Congressman Sentenced to 10 Years for Stealing Charitable Donations

By **Matt Stevens**

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A former United States representative from Texas was sentenced Wednesday to 10 years in prison and ordered to pay about \$1 million in restitution after being convicted of stealing hundreds of thousands of dollars meant for charity and using it to pay for personal expenses and his political campaigns.

In April, a federal jury found the former congressman, Steve Stockman, 61, guilty on 23 counts — including money laundering, conspiracy and making false statements — after prosecutors alleged that he had orchestrated a yearslong scheme to defraud charitable donors.

Two of Mr. Stockman's former aides also pleaded guilty last year to multiple counts connected to the case.

“At trial, the government proved to the jury that former Congressman Stockman ran his campaign and fraudulent charities to simply enrich himself and defrauded well-meaning donors,” Ryan K. Patrick, United States attorney for the Southern District of Texas, said in a statement on Wednesday. “This type of corruption by public officials gives our entire democratic system a black eye.”

Marlo P. Cadeddu, a lawyer for Mr. Stockman, said in an interview on Wednesday that the government had asked for a 210-month sentence, “so this is better than it could have been” and “we’re gratified by that.”

She added that in the coming weeks, her team plans to appeal Mr. Stockman's

conviction to the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit.

Mr. Stockman, a Republican, served one term in the mid-1990s and another from 2013 to 2015. He also ran unsuccessfully for United States Senate in 2014. Throughout his latter days in politics, Mr. Stockman stood out for being intensely anti-Obama. In 2014, Mr. Stockman walked out of Mr. Obama's State of the Union address in protest. He also sold Obama "barf bags" as a campaign fund-raiser.

At trial, prosecutors alleged that from May 2010 to February 2014, Mr. Stockman and his aides solicited about \$1.25 million in charitable donations "based on false pretenses, then used a series of sham nonprofit organizations and dozens of bank accounts to launder the money," a Justice Department statement said.

Specifically, prosecutors alleged that in 2010, Mr. Stockman and one of his aides solicited an elderly donor for \$285,000, which the pair said would be used for legitimate charitable and educational purposes. Instead, they used a sham charity to funnel the money such that it could be used for a variety of personal expenses.

In the years that followed, prosecutors said Mr. Stockman and the aide received an additional \$165,000 in charitable donations from the donor, much of which Mr. Stockman used illegally to finance his 2012 congressional campaign.

Such behavior continued after Mr. Stockman took office in 2013, according the Justice Department. He and the aide used the name of another sham nonprofit entity — "Life Without Limits" — to solicit a \$350,000 charitable donation, which he said would be used to create an educational center called the Freedom House. Instead the money went to a variety of personal and campaign expenses, prosecutors said.

Prosecutors also showed at trial that Mr. Stockman did not pay taxes on the

fraudulently acquired donations. At one point, Mr. Stockman even directed one of his aides to flee to Cairo so that the aide could not be questioned by law enforcement agencies, the Justice Department said.

Recounting Wednesday's sentencing from inside the courtroom, Courthouse News Service reported that Judge Lee Rosenthal of United States District Court admonished Mr. Stockman, saying he had shown a willingness to exploit others and ruin their lives. And after handing down Mr. Stockman's 120-month sentence, she reportedly quipped: "That's a long time, but Mr. Stockman, I think you earned it."