

[Larry Householder, Sam Randazzo have been prosecuted for accepting bribes. What about the FirstEnergy execs who paid them?](#)

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COLUMBUS, Ohio—Former Ohio House Speaker Larry Householder may sit in prison for most, if not all, of the rest of his life for accepting more than \$60 million in FirstEnergy bribe money.

Three others connected to Householder's bribery scheme have either been handed a years-long prison sentence or are awaiting sentencing after pleading guilty.

On Monday, [prosecutors unsealed an indictment against Sam Randazzo](#), formerly the state's top utilities regulator, on charges that he accepted a \$4.3 million bribe offered by former FirstEnergy CEO Chuck Jones and Mike Dowling, previously the company's chief lobbyist, in December 2018.

But while federal prosecutors have targeted the people who received FirstEnergy's millions, so far they have been silent when it comes to charges against the people who – according to the company itself – arranged to hand them the cash.

Chief among those people are Jones and Dowling, both of whom [were fired in late 2020](#) amid multiple investigations into the bribe money.

In 2021, FirstEnergy admitted to bribing Householder and Randazzo and described in detail to federal prosecutors how Jones and Dowling played a central role in the enterprise. Last year, after a federal judge asked attorneys for FirstEnergy shareholders "who paid the bribes" in the House Bill 6 scandal, [they named Jones and Dowling](#).

Jones has [repeatedly insisted](#) he is innocent of any crime. [Cleveland.com/The Plain Dealer](#) has reached out to attorneys for Jones and Dowling, respectively, for comment.

U.S. Attorney Kenneth Parker's office, as well as federal law enforcement, have been characteristically silent about why they haven't indicted Jones, Dowling or any other FirstEnergy officials. Attorneys for Jones and Dowling [stated in a March court filing](#) that the two faced "looming potential indictments" and were "undeniably at the forefront" of the criminal investigation into the HB6 scandal.

"As U.S. Attorney Parker has previously confirmed, our work on this matter continues," said Jennifer Thornton, a spokesman for Parker's office, in a statement. "While we can never confirm any potential charges that may be brought in the future, we continue to work diligently."

A trove of texts and emails to and from Jones and Dowling, which were made public over the past three years, has revealed in detail how they worked with Householder and Randazzo to pass the corrupt House Bill 6 and shape state regulations to help their \$21 billion company.

Jones and Householder flew together in FirstEnergy's private jet to attend Donald Trump's presidential inauguration in January 2017, then met with Dowling and others at a fancy Washington, D.C., steakhouse. [Prosecutors said](#) at Householder's trial earlier this year that trip led to the creation of a "dark money" nonprofit controlled by Householder that FirstEnergy stuffed with tens of millions of dollars to help pass and protect HB6, a 2019 energy law that – among other perks for FirstEnergy – offered a \$1 billion-plus bailout for two nuclear power plants then owned by a company subsidiary.

Jones led the push for Householder to become House speaker in 2019. The two were extremely close, [emailing and texting each other several times a week](#) about issues surrounding House Bill 6. After the bill passed the legislature in July 2019, [Jones texted Randazzo](#), "HB6 F--- ANYBODY WHO AIN'T US," along with a photoshopped image of Mount Rushmore featuring the faces of Dowling, Randazzo, and two others.

In 2018, text messages show that Jones and Dowling met with Randazzo at the latter's Columbus condo, devising a plan for Randazzo to become chair of the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio -- the regulatory body that oversaw FirstEnergy and other utilities -- and for the company to pay Randazzo \$4.3 million. "We're going to get this handled this year, paid in full, no discount," Jones texted Randazzo on Dec. 19, 2018. "Don't forget about us or hurricane Chuck may show up on your doorstep!"

Jones [texted another company executive in March 2020](#) that Randazzo had been “overruling” staff and other commissioners to help FirstEnergy, including “burning” the final report of a PUCO-commissioned audit into a company customer charge the Ohio Supreme Court overturned the previous year.

Ashley Brown, a former PUCO commissioner, told [cleveland.com/The Plain Dealer](#) on Monday that it’s “curious” that the U.S. Justice Department has prosecuted Householder and Randazzo for accepting bribes, but not the executives identified as the ones who paid them.

“FirstEnergy didn’t act as artificial intelligence. It’s clear that there are human beings here that need to be dealt with,” Brown said. “The justice system needs to deal with it. Presumably that will come, and that’s certainly taking a long time.”

Andrew J. Tobias contributed to this story.