

Greg Meffert happy with surprising crime-camera trial testimony, was ready 'for the truth to come out'

By [David Hammer, The Times-Picayune](#)
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Just hours after learning that his sister had died in an accident overnight, embattled former New Orleans technology chief Greg Meffert gave seven grueling hours of testimony in a civil trial over city crime cameras, and by controlling the discourse with long answers, he appeared to have the plaintiffs flummoxed.

After it came to light that Meffert is a target of a parallel federal criminal probe into the crime-camera contracts, his lawyers had said he would invoke his Fifth Amendment rights against self-incrimination if forced to take the stand. They even fought Judge Rose Ledet's ruling that Meffert would have to appear as a witness.

But this week, the strategy suddenly changed -- at Meffert's urging.

"I was done waiting for the truth to come out, and that's the truth," Meffert said as he rushed to the airport Tuesday evening to try to catch a flight to be with his grieving family.

His lawyer, Randy Smith, clearly saw his client's testimony as a victory for Meffert and a possibly disastrous turn for plaintiffs Southern Electronics and Active Solutions -- two local companies who allege Meffert was at the center of a conspiracy with computer giant Dell Inc. and companies owned by city vendor Mark St. Pierre to swipe Southern and Active's technology and their business.

"The motto is, 'Be careful what you ask for,'" Smith said triumphantly. "They wanted the truth? Well, the truth hurts."

But plaintiffs attorney Jim Garner said it was just the opposite. He said Meffert's testimony puts his side "right on schedule." The plaintiffs certainly got key testimony from Meffert confirming that he had a corporate credit card from St. Pierre's NetMethods, hustled business for them while in his city post and approved a purchase order for Dell and St. Pierre's Veracent to buy crime cameras before he left office.

Smith said Meffert wanted the chance to answer some questions, and when none of them presented a problem in the criminal realm, Meffert answered them all.

"They never asked a question that I thought he needed to take the Fifth to," Smith explained.

The plaintiffs' interests in the civil case don't always match up with what's at issue criminally, and it's unclear if any of Meffert's answers would expose him further to the federal investigation. He was asked very little about the gratuities he helped provide to Mayor Ray Nagin using a credit card from St. Pierre's firm, NetMethods. Garner asked him about a December 2004 vacation Meffert shared with Nagin in Hawaii, but didn't ask him whether he ever told the mayor about who was paying. Neither did Garner ask Meffert any questions about a 2005 trip to Jamaica for the whole Nagin family or a 2006 trip to Chicago for a campaign fundraiser, even though charges for both appear in Meffert's NetMethods credit card billing statements.

When it came to implications for the federal case, Smith certainly wasn't worried afterward. "As long as he was telling the truth" there's no problem, he said. "And the truth is that there's no truth to these allegations" by the plaintiffs in the civil trial



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