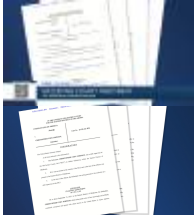


First indictment after 2023 McCurtain County sheriff scandal

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MCCURTAIN COUNTY — After two years, a federal court issued the first criminal indictment related to a scandal that rocked McCurtain County under the administration of now-ousted Sheriff Kevin Clardy.

There have been several lawsuits filed stemming from alleged corruption, but no criminal charges, until now. The U.S. Attorney's Office has charged Cody Johnson, a former McCurtain County jail supervisor. He's accused of co-conspiring an attack at the jail.

Here is how it unfolded:

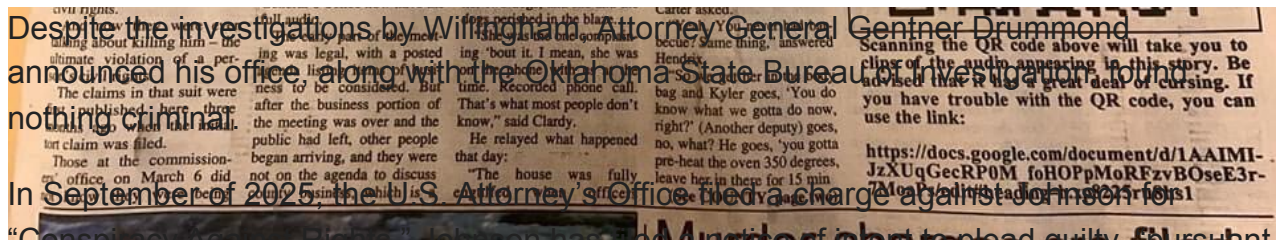
In 2023, audio of Clardy and others, released by the McCurtain Gazette, sparked national public outrage and led to the sheriff losing re-election.

The recordings included blatant racism and plotting to kill two of the Gazette journalists.

For years, Gazette reporter Chris Willingham had been investigating various allegations of corruption within the sheriff's office, including the beating of Roper Harris. Harris, 19 at the time, claimed Clardy arrested him at his apartment and got brutally beaten inside the jail over a protective order. He also claims county officials planned the attack because Harris was involved with the jail administrator's stepdaughter.

Harris filed a civil rights lawsuits, which is still pending. It states that Roper was left bloody, bruised and with a severe injury to his eye due to a pepperball fired at him at close range.





“Conspiracy Against Rights. Johnson has filed a notice of intent to plead guilty, pursuant to a plea agreement.”

That, along with conspiracy charges, leaves looming questions over whether there could be more indictments.

Amid multiple lawsuits, Clardy has reportedly since left the county. His whereabouts are unclear.

Attorneys for both sides told us they had no comment.

Johnson has a court date scheduled for Sept. 17, where we hope to learn more about the allegations.

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